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SEPTEMBER 1999 NO. 34

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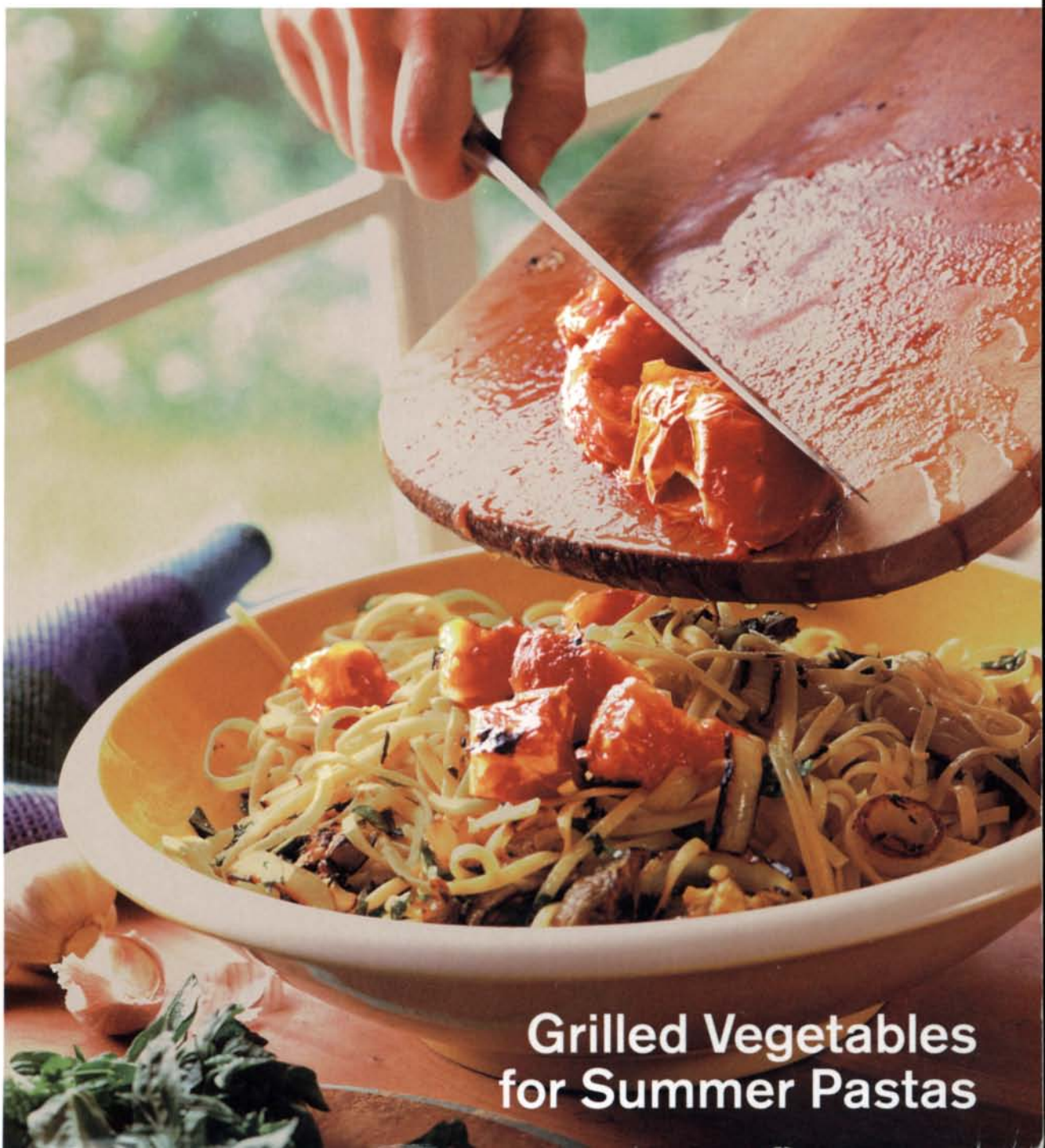
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2 tablespoons Italian seasoning  
1 tablespoon salt  
1 teaspoon pepper  
Bottled lemon juice or citric acid

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44 Bake a batch of brownies with the texture you like best—cakey, chewy, or fudgy.



# fine COOKING®

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Cover photo, Scott Phillips. These pages: top left series, Scott Phillips; bottom left, Judi Rutz; above, Mark Ferri; below, Scott Phillips.



visit our web site: [www.finecooking.com](http://www.finecooking.com)





**Abigail Johnson Dodge** is *Fine Cooking's* test kitchen director. After studying at La Varenne in

Paris, she worked under celebrated French chefs Michel Guerard and Guy Savoy.

When she isn't wielding her ruler, her Pyrex measuring cups, or her handy scale to make absolutely sure that every *Fine Cooking* recipe will work at home, Abby is busy working on her second cookbook, *Williams-Sonoma Cooking For Kids*, due out next fall. She is also the author of

*Great Fruit Desserts* and was a contributor to *The New Joy of Cooking*. Abby regularly appears on television and teaches classes around the country. She frequently writes for *Fine Cooking*, including "Classic American Pies" (#29), and this month's "Choose the Ripest Fruit for Juicy Desserts" (p. 62). Visit [www.finecooking.com](http://www.finecooking.com) to see her videos on pies and fruit foods.



once a year, and is the author of *Classical Turkish Cooking: Traditional Turkish Food for the American Kitchen*, *The Complete Book of Turkish Cooking*, as well as the text for *Mediterranean the Beautiful*.

**Cindy Mitchell** ("Brownies," p. 44) was a staunch proponent of cakey brownies before she researched and wrote on them for *Fine Cooking*, but now she believes that cakey, chewy, and fudgy each have their virtues. Cindy and her husband, Glenn, own Grace Baking in the San Francisco Bay area, which has won many awards over the last twelve years. While Glenn handles the bread, Cindy's domain is cookies, cakes, and pastries.

Shortly after **Sarah Jay**, an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*, earned her master's degree in journalism from Columbia, she withdrew her life savings and spent seven months hopscotching through thirteen countries, from Spain to Turkey. In Istanbul, she picked up several brass pepper mills. But while reporting her story ("Pepper Mills," p. 50), she discovered, with a bit of regret, that the handsome Turkish mills were not high performers. They now adorn her mantle.

By braving 120-degree noonday sizzle, wearing all white, and staying calm, **Amy Albert** ("Of Bees and Honey," p. 54) managed not to get stung by a single bee while researching artisan honey-making for this issue. Amy is an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*.

**Katy Sparks** ("Tempura," p. 57) is the chef at Quilty's, a Manhattan restaurant that has been garnering accolades since it opened three years ago. A graduate of Johnson & Wales Cooking School, Katy has worked at



Al Forno in Providence, Rhode Island, and, more recently, at the Quilted Giraffe alongside Barry Wine, who introduced her to many of the Asian techniques that are now an integral part of her repertoire.

## Clifford A. Wright

("Turn Grilled Vegetables into Savory Pasta Sauces," p. 22) is the author of *Grill Italian*. His next book is *A Mediterranean Feast*, a comprehensive tome on Mediterranean food and history, will be published this fall by Morrow. Visit Cliff's web site at [www.cliffordawright.com](http://www.cliffordawright.com).



**Nancie McDermott** ("Fried Chicken," p. 27) is a cooking teacher and food writer who specializes in the cuisine of Thailand, where she spent three years as a Peace Corps volunteer. Her cookbooks include *Real Thai* and *The Curry Book*. Nancie recently left southern California to return to her home state of North Carolina, where she hopes her young daughters will pick up a southern accent, learn that macaroni and cheese can be considered a vegetable, and that iced tea is supposed to be sweet—really sweet.

## David Page and Barbara Shinn

("Slaws," p. 30) own two New York City restaurants, Home and Drovers Tap Room, as well as Home Away from Home, a takeout store featuring items from both restaurants. They're writing a cookbook about the home kitchen, family, and friends. Barbara and David recently bought a 22-acre farm not far from their house in the North Fork of Long Island, where they plan to start their own vineyard next year.

**Stephen Kalt** ("Roast Tomatoes Low and Slow," p. 33) is a New York City chef and restaurant consultant who can't seem to get enough of the food business. He used his business degree to start and operate a group of five Italian restaurants in Tennessee. When he decided he wanted to be behind the stove, he trained at Le Cirque, Spago, The Mansion at Turtle Creek, and Cafe Annie. Ultimately, Stephen combined his cooking and business talents to form a company that develops food, service, and design concepts for restaurants. That didn't stop him from opening two of his own restaurants in New York City, Spartina and Spazzia.

**Sam Hayward** ("Grilling Clams and Oysters," p. 36) is the chef and co-owner of Fore Street restaurant in Portland, Maine.



He first cooked professionally on a working vacation from the music business (he played bass). After apprenticeships that took him from New Orleans to New York, Sam returned to Maine.

Before opening Fore Street in 1996, Sam was the executive chef at the plush Haraseket Inn in Freeport, Maine.

**Ayla Algar** ("Eggplant," p. 39) is the Mellon Lecturer in Turkish at the University of California at Berkeley. She was born and raised in Turkey, goes back to visit at least



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## Watch your fingers, please

Love your magazine—always interesting and informative.

"Sizing Up Slicers" in *Fine Cooking* #32 (pp. 43–45), was very enlightening. I do think, however, that much more emphasis and warning should have been put into using the safety holder *at all times*. A slicer is dangerous to use without one, as the blade is so very sharp and can cut fingers very badly. Also, it's best to keep the slicer in a covered container with a tight seal, out of reach and sight of the children.

I've been using a Boerner V-slicer for many years, and I find it excellent for slicing oranges and lemons when making marmalade. I start by slicing off the ends of the fruit with a sharp knife. I cut larger fruit in half or quarters before slicing, and I always use the safety holder.

Keep up the good work.

—Doris M. Whiddett,  
Scarborough, Ontario

## Have another slice of coffee cake

I want to offer a few tips about Joanne Chang's Coffee "Tea" Cake from her article in *Fine Cooking* #32 (p. 69). First, I recommend using a food processor to cut the cold butter into the flour mixture. Three one-second pulses should do the trick, and save your readers the hassle of forcing unwieldy cubed butter through the blades of a mixer.

I prepared the not-too-sweet cake for a houseguest, who remarked that she enjoyed the crisp edge. I decided to experiment with the leftover servings. Here's what I

recommend: cut the baked cake into half-inch slices and bake the slices on a sheet pan in a 350°F oven for about 10 minutes on each side. Let the slices cool and enjoy the best biscotti recipe I've found!

Thank you for an attractive, informative publication.

—Allison Anthony,  
Summit, NJ

## Homely buds are tasty bites

I just wanted to pass along the fact that garlic chive flowers are edible if picked young enough, which was not clarified in Aliza Green's "A Cook's Guide to Fresh Herbs" (*Fine Cooking* #33, pp. 40–45). Perhaps not at their prettiest at the bud stage, they are however tender, juicy, and absolutely delicious. The buds can be found in Asian markets during the spring and are wonderful cooked as one would garlic chives, usually sautéed with other ingredients. The flavor is strong but not overwhelming.

—Dale Hwang,  
New York City

## Look for this book

In *Fine Cooking* #31, you published a letter expressing interest in Afghan cooking. I have just learned that *Noshe Djan: Afghan Food & Cookery*, by Helen Saberi, published in England by Prospect Books in 1986 and now out of print, is to be issued in a revised American edition next year by Hippocrene Books.

This is an interesting, well-informed book, descriptive of an Afghanistan that I fear does not exist any longer. The book has been well received and lauded by Middle Eastern cooking authority Claudia

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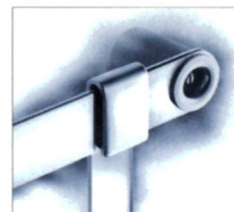
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—Ann Semple,  
Ottawa, Ontario

## More on ethnic cuisine

Having travelled down the ethnic foods cookbook road with our book, *The Great Chicago Meltingpot Cookbook*, we do have a suggestion concerning ethnic food. It would be deliciously enlightening to have a series of articles on ethnic food similarities, say, meat-stuffed dough: ravioli, pierogi, vareniki, kolduny, or the various Chinese filled savories. There are certainly a plethora of ethnic cookbooks, but nobody, to our knowledge, has compared ethnic approaches to the same basic concept.

—John L. Leckel &  
Agnes Feeney, via e-mail

## At last, the jewel in her culinary crown

I started cooking the family meals at age ten, out of self-defense against my mother's approach to food. This began a lifelong love of cooking. Consequently, just about everything from pizza to relish to chocolates is homemade around here.

The one thing I've never been able to achieve, however, is properly cooked rice. It has become a long-standing family joke that this "simple"

task has eluded me, and some of my attempts have become the source of family legend—until I came across Niloufer King's article in *Fine Cooking* #31 (pp. 16–18). I read it a few times, highlighted the important bits, and actually made rice so good my husband thought that either (a) I had gotten someone else to make it, or (b) I had ordered it out. I have since managed to repeat this miracle three times. Many thanks to Ms. King and to your always enlightening magazine.

—Suzin McPherson,  
Kingston, Ontario

## My foolproof rice method

I read Niloufer King's article on cooking rice with interest as I never could understand why so many people have trouble cooking rice or why they complain about the cooked rice sticking to the pot.

Although I usually use a rice cooker, I often cook rice in a pot when my cooker is in the dishwasher. My technique may only work on an electric stove and does require watching during the boiling stage.

I usually use jasmine rice (similar to basmati), although I have cooked medium-grain rice for sushi this way as well. I measure out the rice and water into a pot, using two parts rice to three parts water (more or less water for old or

new rice), and put the uncovered pot over high heat on the burner. (I don't soak or wash the rice.) I turn down the heat once the water starts boiling to avoid undue splashing, but I maintain the boil until the water has boiled down to the level of the rice and the bubbles cause crater-like pockets in the still-wet, shiny surface of the rice. At this point, I turn off the heat, leave the pot on the still-warm

burner, cover the pot, and let it steam by itself for at least 10 minutes, preferably 20 minutes or more. I turn the rice into a serving dish; it comes out freely without leaving a crust at the bottom of the pot.

I guess if folks really have trouble with rice sticking to the pot, they could use a non-stick pot, but I've never had trouble with my old Revere-ware stainless-steel pots.

—Julia Tien, via e-mail ♦

## Getting the most from *Fine Cooking's* recipes

When you cook from a *Fine Cooking* recipe, we want you to get as good a result as we did in our test kitchen, so we recommend that you follow the guidelines below in addition to the recipe instructions.

Before you start to cook, read the recipe completely. Gather the ingredients and prepare them as directed in the recipe list before proceeding to the method. Give your oven plenty of time to heat to the temperature in the recipe; use an oven thermometer to check.

Always start checking for doneness a few minutes before the suggested time in the recipe. For meat and poultry, use an instant-read thermometer.

In baking recipes especially, the amounts of some ingredients (flour, butter, nuts, etc.) are listed by weight (pounds, ounces) and by volume (cups, tablespoons). Professional bakers measure by weight for consistent results, but we list volume measures too because not many home cooks have scales (although we highly recommend them—see *Fine Cooking* #13, p. 68, and #17, p. 62).

To measure flour by volume, stir the flour and then lightly spoon it into a dry measure and level it with a knife; don't shake or tap the cup. Measure liquids in glass or plastic liquid measuring cups.

Unless otherwise noted, assume that

- ♦ Butter is unsalted.
- ♦ Eggs are large (about 2 ounces each).
- ♦ Flour is all-purpose (don't sift unless directed to).
- ♦ Sugar is granulated.
- ♦ Garlic, onions, and fresh ginger are peeled.
- ♦ Fresh herbs, greens, and lettuces are washed and dried.

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# Compared to kosher, ordinary chicken doesn't have a prayer.

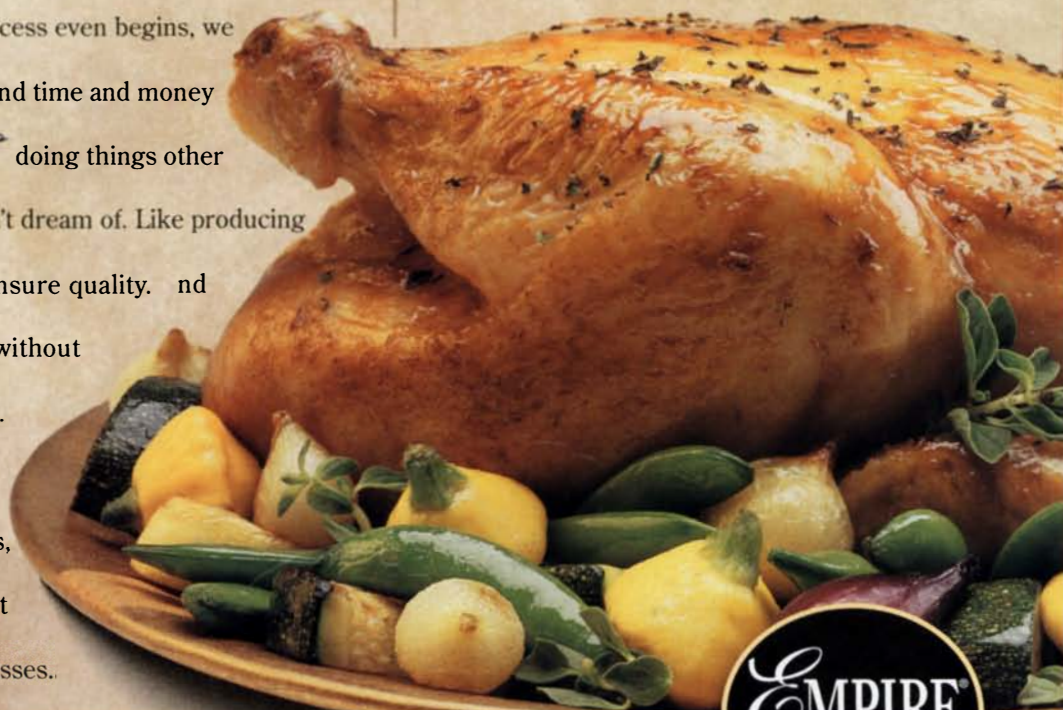
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Have a question of general interest about cooking?

Send it to Q&A, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

### Drying chile peppers

*I grow a lot of poblano chiles in my garden. What's the best way to dry them?*

—Aaron Sheehan-Dean, via e-mail

**Dave DeWitt replies:** Drying chiles is one of the best ways to preserve your harvest, but be sure to dry them when they're fully ripe for the finest flavor. For poblanos, this means when they turn bright red. Any type of chile can be dried by one of the following methods, except for jalapeños, which do best when they're smoke-dried (turning them into chipotles). Don't try drying chiles with black spots; they'll turn moldy and rot.

If you live in a dry climate, the simplest way to dry the chiles is to tie them on a string by their stems, in clusters of three, and hang them in the sun. This is called a *ristra*. When the pods are dry but still pliable (this could take weeks, depending on the heat and humidity), hang them indoors and out of direct sunlight to finish drying.

In areas of high humidity, the chiles might rot before the sun can dry them, so your best bet is to halve them lengthwise and use the oven (or a food dehydrator). In a gas oven, set the halved chiles directly on a baking sheet and dry them using just the heat from the pilot light. This may take a couple of days or longer. In an electric oven, the chiles will dry much faster. Set the oven to low, about 175°F, and check the chiles every few minutes to make sure they don't burn.

The chiles are fully dry when they snap, not just bend. Store them in sealed glass jars in a cupboard, or in the freezer double-wrapped in freezer bags. (Don't put bagged chiles in a cupboard because the plastic is porous and the chiles can oxidize, ruining both the color and the flavor.) With both storage methods, dried chiles last indefinitely.

To reconstitute the chiles, soak them in hot water for about 15 minutes, fry them in a bit of oil until they puff up, or lightly roast them. Dried chiles can also be ground to a powder when you're ready to use them (no earlier, because the powder would lose its flavor). *Dave DeWitt is the author of The Chile Pepper Encyclopedia (William Morrow).*

### What happens to nutrients in parboiled rice?

*What is parboiled or converted rice, and how does it differ nutritionally from plain white rice?*

—Deborah Dunham, via e-mail

**Naomi Duguid and Jeffrey Alford reply:** Parboiling rice is a very old process that developed centuries ago in the villages of India; it's now widely used in the United States. In parboiling, unmilled rice (still in its rough outer husk) is boiled or steam-heated for a short time. This drives the B vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, and niacin) from the outer bran into the center of the grain, called the endosperm. The rice is cooled, dried, and milled of its husk, and then it's usually milled and polished to remove the bran and germ, becoming "white" parboiled rice. (Brown parboiled rice, which retains its bran coating, is available in

specialty stores.) "Converted" rice is a term trademarked by Uncle Ben's for its version of parboiled rice.

Because the nutrients have migrated to the grain's center, parboiled white rice has more B vitamins than plain white rice, which loses those vitamins when its bran is removed. But most rice sold in the U.S. is coated with an enriching powder of B vitamins and calcium, so its nutritional value is about the same as parboiled rice, as long as you don't wash it.

Parboiled rice is slightly yellow or tan, and its grains are firmer and remain more separate after cooking. Also, the parboiling and cooling process hardens the starches in the endosperm. So, unless parboiled rice has also been pre-cooked and dried (which turns it into instant or Minute rice), it takes a little longer to cook than regular rice. Parboiled rice doesn't absorb much liquid during cooking, and because of that, it isn't appropriate for risotto, paella, or any other rice dish that cooks in a flavorful liquid. Instead, partner parboiled rice with a highly seasoned sauce or dish, such as an Indian curry or a stew. *Naomi Duguid and Jeffrey Alford are the authors of Seductions of Rice (Artisan).* ♦





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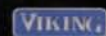


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READER SERVICE NO. 34



## Try a tomato “shark” for quick coring

When I worked in a gourmet market, I once had to make 100 pounds of tomato, corn, and basil salad on a busy summer weekend. That’s when my tomato “shark” became my best friend. A little tool that looks like a melon baller with sharp teeth, the shark rips out the core of a tomato with one quick flick of the wrist. You’ll find it really handy even if you’re only coring a dozen tomatoes for a picnic salad. I like the red-handled Tomato Core-It (above), which is sold in restaurant-supply stores (for a store near you, call Prince Castle Co., 800/722-7853). Other versions are sold in kitchen stores, or check Lechter’s Housewares, where a corer with a slightly less ergonomic handle is sold for about \$3.

—Susie Middleton, associate editor,  
Fine Cooking

## Stir-fry outdoors with The Sizzler

At first I was a little skeptical of a product called The Sizzler, an outdoor gas burner. But that was before I learned about its powerful heat (up to 130,000 Btu), its great cooking surface (a large, shallow, carbon-steel disk that seasons up like cast iron), and its easy assembly. And once I made my first batch of *fajitas*, I was hooked. I began to think of all the times I’d wished I had a really powerful burner for *real* stir-frying and the ventilation to go with it (why *not* cook outdoors?).

I used The Sizzler on its sturdy steel stand (32-inch height), though it can also be assembled at a 12-inch height. It breaks down well for travelling and includes a hose and a flame-control



valve to hook up to your propane tank. The Sizzler is \$149.95, plus shipping. For information and recipes, visit the web site, [www.thesizzler.com](http://www.thesizzler.com), or call 888/784-7379. —S. M.

## Cyberkitchen: Replace appliance parts online

You need an extra bowl for your KitchenAid mixer or you’ve lost the lid to your Oster blender. Maybe you’ve cracked your Krups coffee pot or broken the feed tube on your Cuisinart lid. To find replacement parts quickly, search [www.culinaryparts.com](http://www.culinaryparts.com). Culinary Parts Unlimited has been replacing countertop appliance parts since 1976; now its stock of 500,000 parts in nearly 40 brands is even more accessible to you online.



## Versatile verjus is like vinegar without the sour

The newest addition to my list of favorite kitchen staples is a California company’s take on a centuries-old byproduct of winemaking called *verjus*.

*Verjus* (pronounced vehr-ZHOO) is the unfermented juice of under-ripe top-quality wine grapes—from the Napa Valley, in the case of the *verjus* I’ve been using from a company called

Fusion. The light, sweet-tart juice doesn’t

have any of the acetic acid of vinegar, making it perfect for wine-friendly salad dressings (use 1 part *verjus* to 3 parts oil).

In fact, Fusion *verjus* is a great substitute anytime I might use vinegar, wine, or lemon juice. For example, it makes a fine marinade for meat, poultry, and seafood, and I love to make a quick pan sauce by deglazing with *verjus*. I also find myself drizzling a bit over vegetables and fish off the grill or adding a splash to pep up the flavor of stews, soups, and braises.

Fusion produces white and red *verjus*; use the white for delicate foods (especially fish and vegetables) and pair the red with more robust, spicier fare. Fusion *verjus* is filtered and pasteurized before bottling in a corked 375ml bottle. Once opened, it lasts for a month in the fridge. It’s available (\$9 per bottle) in kitchen specialty stores and by mail from Dean & DeLuca (800/221-7714).

—Molly Stevens,  
contributing editor,  
Fine Cooking



## Flavored grapeseed oil has it all

I love grapeseed oil. Not only does it have a high smoke point, making it great for sautéing and frying, but it's also healthy: packed with vitamin E and linoleic acid (also called omega-6). Now Salute Santé, maker of an exceptional grapeseed oil, has added another reason to love grapeseed oil: flavor.

For its new line of oils, the company has infused its 100% natural Italian grapeseed oil with organic ingredients to create five different flavors: basil, lemon, rosemary, roasted garlic, and chile. You know you're in for something wonderful as soon as you open one of the 97% UV-filtered glass

bottles. The basil smells as if you were holding a fresh bouquet of the herb right under your nose, the lemon as if you were making lemonade.

As wonderful as they are to smell, cooking with them is even more fun. Asparagus tossed with the lemon oil and then roasted has a bright, citrusy zing. The chile oil, which has the least interesting flavor straight out of the bottle, added a nice touch of heat to a beef and broccoli stir-fry.

But you'll get the most intense flavors using these oils straight from the bottle. Plain cooked white beans became delicious once drizzled with rosemary oil and were even

better with an added touch of the roasted garlic oil.

The oils are a natural for vinaigrettes, for marinades, and for dipping. The roasted garlic stood up so well to balsamic vinegar that I had to eat almost an entire loaf of bread while testing the combination. A mayonnaise made with two parts basil oil and one part olive oil tasted fresh and lively, with the basil flavor coming through loud and clear. In fact, because the flavor is so potent, diluting the basil oil with olive oil also makes economic sense, as an



8-ounce bottle of the oil costs \$9.50. Salute Santé Grapeseed Oils are available in specialty foodstores. Call 415/388-7792 or visit [www.salutesante.com](http://www.salutesante.com).

—Joanne Smart, associate editor, Fine Cooking ♦



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READER SERVICE NO. 49

# The Secrets to Making Great Pancakes



**Pancakes are best served piping hot.** Have the butter and syrup warm, too.

**W**hile good pancakes are easy to make, flawless flapjacks require some attention to the critical steps: mixing the batter, getting the heat right, cooking, and flipping.

Although the techniques I cover below are appropriate for all pancakes, I do have a favorite kind—buttermilk. Deliciously airy, tender yet filling, their flavor has more personality thanks to the slight tang of the buttermilk.

## Mix lightly and give the batter a rest

While that other great breakfast food, bread, is kneaded to develop the gluten in the flour, pancakes are mixed minimally to avoid forming toughening gluten. There are

a few ways to ensure that you mix pancake batter well without overmixing it.

**Have all your ingredients at room temperature.** Mix cold buttermilk and eggs with melted butter and you get clumps of butter—not the end of the world, but not optimal for even distribution. Conversely, butter that’s piping hot can cook the eggs.

If you don’t want to get up early to take the ingredients out of the fridge, here are a couple of shortcuts: Place cold eggs in a bowl of warm (not boiling) water for a minute or so. Microwave cold milk for 30 seconds or heat it in a double boiler for a few minutes. You’ll also want to let the melted butter cool a bit.

**Mix the wet and the dry ingredients separately before combining.** This separation allows you to thoroughly and evenly combine most of the ingredients with impunity because the gluten in the flour develops only after the flour is moistened. Your goal when combining the wet with the dry is to do so with as few strokes as possible. The batter’s consistency at this point should resemble a slightly thick, still-lumpy cake batter.

**Give the batter a rest before cooking.** A rest of at least five minutes allows for the even hydration of the batter and also allows the gluten you created—which will develop even with careful, minimal mixing—to relax. The

lumps will smooth out somewhat during this rest.

## Maybe griddlecake is more accurate

For a deliciously browned exterior and an even shape, pancakes need hot, even heat. You can use a pan, but a griddle will give you more room to maneuver and let you cook more pancakes at one time.

I often use a well-seasoned cast-iron griddle, one that straddles two burners. I recently tried an electric griddle, and—to my surprise—I liked it a lot. It let me cook ten pancakes at once, and the temperature remained steady.

## Mix lightly for airy, tender results



**Mix the dry ingredients together in a large bowl and the wet in a medium bowl.** Combine each set of ingredients thoroughly now to avoid overmixing later.



**Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients, as opposed to dry into wet.** This way gives you more control, and less flour flies about.



**Mix with just a few strokes until the batter is evenly moistened.** Ignore the lumps.



**Minimal greasing is best:** pancakes aren't supposed to be fried. Rub on a little vegetable oil with a paper towel. Butter is also good, but take care that it doesn't burn.

**Get the griddle nice and hot before you start.** To test the temperature of the cooking surface, throw a few drops of cold water on it. The drops should sizzle immediately yet dance around before they disappear. If they evaporate immediately, the pan is too hot; if they just sit there without sizzling, the pan is too cool and your pancakes won't get that lovely browned exterior.

### Take a test run

How your batter spreads depends on its consistency, which can vary from batch to batch. A very thin batter will spread unevenly and result in flat pancakes, while a too-thick one won't spread much at all. Until you can gauge how a batter will act, it's a good idea make one test pancake. This test will also let you know how

much space to leave between the pancakes.

I like mine on the thick side and large enough to make an impressive stack. For my batter, two tablespoons should yield a four-inch-wide pancake. To get a well-rounded shape, choose a spoon that will hold about that much batter. Hold the spoon just above the surface of the griddle and let the batter pour slowly from the tip of the spoon. With this rather thick batter, you may also need to spread the batter into a round with the spoon. If you need to thin the batter, add more buttermilk or water, a bit at a time; thicken it with a quick addition of more flour.

**Cook until bubbles cover the surface; flip before they all break.** Before you flip, take a peek at the underside to be sure it's nicely browned. Turn each pancake carefully with a spatula. Bake the second side about half as long as the first. Don't flatten the pancakes with the spatula or they'll become leaden.

**Serve 'em as you make 'em.** Pancakes taste best right off the griddle. This can be a drag if you want to eat with the crowd, but if you really love pancakes, it's worth the sacrifice. Take turns playing short-order cook or have a couple of griddles going at once so you can cook a lot of pancakes simultaneously. If you must, you can keep pancakes in a 200°F oven, spread on a baking sheet lined with a kitchen towel. Don't stack or even overlap them or the resulting steam will make them flabby.

**Have everything else warm.** Cold, rock-hard butter is a sad sight sitting on a pancake. For best eating, have the butter, the syrup, and even the plates at room temperature or, even better, slightly warm.

Although I like my pancakes best simply adorned with syrup and sweet butter, sliced fruit or homemade jam can tempt me. Fruit should be very ripe and also at room temperature. You can add nuts or very soft or cooked fruit

right to the batter or sprinkle them onto the pancakes when they first hit the griddle—a good idea if you want a variety of flavors or if some folks like them plain.

### Basic Buttermilk Pancakes

If buttermilk isn't available, use 2 to 2¼ cups whole milk instead. To play with the texture, try replacing ½ cup of the all-purpose with whole-wheat flour, buckwheat flour, or even medium-grind cornmeal. *Yields twelve 4-inch pancakes.*

**10 oz. (2¼ cups) unbleached, all-purpose flour**  
**1½ tsp. baking powder**  
**½ tsp. baking soda**  
**½ tsp. salt**  
**1 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. sugar**  
**1 oz. (2 Tbs.) butter, melted**  
**2 large eggs**  
**2½ cups buttermilk**  
**Vegetable oil or butter for the pan or griddle**

Mix and cook following the photos beginning on p. 16.

*Kathleen Stewart runs the Downtown Bakery in Healdsburg, California. ♦*

## For good-looking pancakes, get the griddle hot and use a spoon



**Let the batter rest for at least 5 minutes.** You'll see a difference in the batter after it rests. Oil the pan lightly and let it get hot. Water droplets that dance briefly before disappearing mean the heat is right.



**Pour the batter from the tip of a spoon.** Use the spoon to gently spread this fairly thick batter.



**Flip the pancakes when they're covered in bubbles.** Check the underside to be sure it's nicely browned, flip, and cook the other side for about half as long.

## Orange-fleshed honeydew

combines cantaloupe flavor with the flowery overtones of honeydew taste. The Temptation melon shown here is a new hybrid variety with superior flavor; fruits average 2 to 5 pounds.



## Charentais melons

are a French variety especially prized there. These plump 2-pound fruits have either smooth or slightly ribbed and sutured gray-green rinds and bright-orange flesh. When ripe, Charentais have a complex, sweet flavor with a luscious flowery aroma.



## Seedless watermelons,

like this red variety, are among the most recently developed melons. They can be round or oval and weigh 10 to 20 pounds. These juicy, easy-to-eat watermelons may have some edible white seedlike structures, but no true hard seeds.



## Yellow seedless watermelons

have brittle, pastel-yellow flesh that's just as fragrant, juicy, and sweet as their red cousins, offering a fine, sherbet-like flavor.



# New Melon Varieties Make Delicious Summer Refreshers

**L**ike fresh, sweet corn and juicy tomatoes, richly perfumed melons are a focal point of summer eating. Most of us grew up with the sweet, crisp flesh of cantaloupe and the softer floral flavor of honeydew, but in the last five or six years, melon choices have been rapidly expanding. You can now find new hybrids, rediscovered heirlooms, and more exotic varieties from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Good supermarkets, farmstands, and farmers' markets offer a larger selection of these wonderful fruits, with strikingly colored flesh and rinds, varied shapes, and superlative flavors.

## Lift it, smell it, thump it

At the market, look for unblemished melons that are

firm with absolutely no soft or bruised spots.

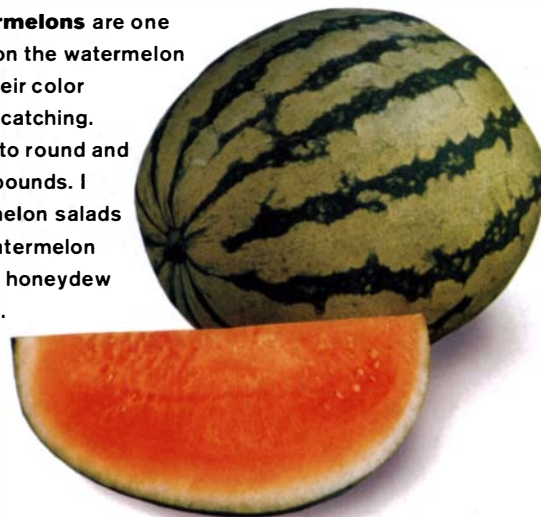
♦ **Fully ripe fruit should feel quite heavy for its size.** Pick up a few and choose the heaviest melon you can find.

♦ **The melon should smell sweet and flowerlike** or richly perfumed, never unpleasantly musky or slightly fermented. The stem end is the best place to smell for ripeness, although some very aromatic thin-skinned varieties are fragrant all over. If a melon has absolutely no smell, it may be underripe, so choose another.

♦ **Melon skin should be unblemished.** Both netted and smooth-skinned varieties should be without wrinkles or bumps on their rinds.

♦ **Ripe melons make a hollow sound** when you tap them, rather than just a dull

**Orange watermelons** are one of the newest on the watermelon scene; I find their color especially eye-catching. Fruits are oval to round and weigh 8 to 10 pounds. I love to make melon salads with orange watermelon and pale green honeydew with fresh mint.





thud. Give it a thump with your knuckles and listen.

The perfect melon is a combination of the qualities above. But if you run across an exotic variety you've never seen before, it may be difficult to tell if it's ripe. Farmers and agronomists actually use an instrument called a fructometer in the field to gauge ripeness by measuring the percentage of sugar in degrees.

If you want to try a new variety, ask the produce or farmstand manager for pointers on how to judge ripeness and quality, and for help in picking out the best specimen, maybe even try for a taste.

### Serve just slightly chilled

Once you get your ripe melons home, store them in the refrigerator. Plan to use them within a few days. One exception is Christmas melons, a class of Spanish melons that can be kept for up to six weeks longer than others.

Take melons out of the refrigerator about a half an hour before you plan to eat them because most of these fruits

have a perfumed fragrance and sweetness that's dampened by the icy chill of a modern refrigerator. Plan to serve them when they're still slightly cool to enjoy their natural aroma and sweetness.

### A delicious foil for salty and spicy flavors

Melon is a classic for summer fruit salads, and it's good in savory preparations, too.

**Combine melons with salty and spicy flavors.** Try the classic Italian appetizer, a slice of perfectly ripe melon draped with a thin strip of prosciutto. Chop up melons for fresh chutneys or relishes to serve with grilled meat or poultry. Try a Mexican-style salsa for grilled chicken: a small dice of melon, a minced hot chile, lime juice, garlic, and cilantro.

**A squeeze of fresh lime or a sprig of mint makes melon even more luscious.** Serve melon slices for dessert, or toss chunks into a dessert fruit salad with ripe berries. Dice several different varieties and toss them into a

**Christmas or Santa Claus melons** have holiday names because they keep in storage for up to several months and are perfect to buy in late fall for holiday meals. Hybrids of Spanish

**Piel de Sapo** melons, these football-shaped fruits weigh 5 to 7 pounds. The rinds are a mottled dark

green streaked with gray-yellow markings (*piel de sapo* means "frog skin"). The flesh is juicy with a mellow, refreshing taste that's not quite as sweet as a honeydew but delicious nonetheless.



**Galia melons**, originally developed by breeders in Israel, were the first hybrid of intensely perfumed Middle Eastern melons. They have a rich green and gold close-netted rind and dense pale-green flesh; they weigh 2 to 3 pounds. Highly aromatic, Galias have intense spicy-sweet flesh and are prized as luscious dessert melons.

**Cantaloupes** are the most popular domestic melons, with a sweet, nutty taste. You'll find them in several types.

**This Eastern-style melon** is larger, with soft, thick, juicy flesh; at farmers' markets, you may have seen it labeled as a muskmelon, a more traditional term. All cantaloupes are ripe when the skin under the netting is a golden sandy color rather than green or bright orange.



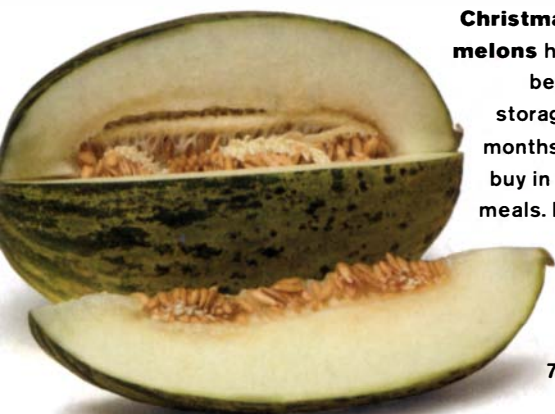
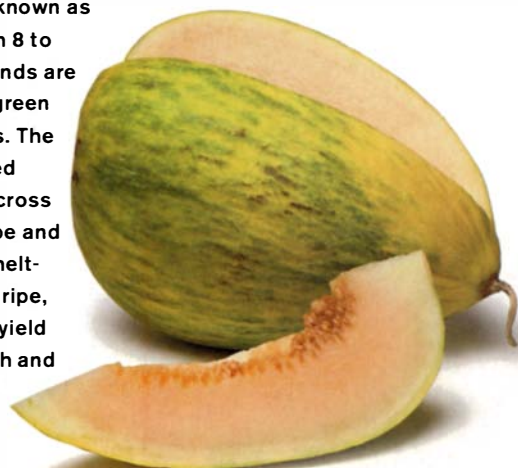
mixed melon salad. Ripe melons are wonderful frozen into sorbets or whizzed in the blender with fruit juice and ice for slushy summer coolers.



*Renee Shepherd is a gardening cook and seed cataloguer. Her company, Renee's Garden, offers gourmet seed packets at independent nurseries. ♦*

**Western Shipper** type cantaloupes are smaller, with crunchy-firm flesh, less aroma than Eastern-style melons, and tight, small, netting. Despite their name, Western Shippers are now widely distributed throughout the country.

**Crenshaws**, also known as **Cranshaws**, weigh 8 to 10 pounds. Their rinds are yellow with some green streaks or blotches. The thick, peach-colored flesh tastes like a cross between cantaloupe and honeydew and is melt-ingly tender. When ripe, Crenshaw melons yield slightly to the touch and feel very heavy for their size.



Do you have a better way to clean fresh greens, a neat trick for handling sticky bread dough, or a new way to use an old kitchen tool? Write to **Tips**, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Or send your tip by e-mail to [fc@taunton.com](mailto:fc@taunton.com). We pay for tips we publish.

## Easier pie crusts

For people who have warm hands or who, like me, get frustrated trying to get the flour-coated crumbs of butter to form a cohesive pie crust dough, try this method: After cutting fat into flour for pie crust dough, I mix in as much water or egg as the dough will need. Then I dump everything onto a large piece of plastic wrap. I pull the corners up above the dough and twist the package closed, leaving a bit of room to spare. It's then no problem to shape the dough into a thick disk (the plastic stretches), which is ready for rolling or for the freezer. I find this method keeps me from overworking the dough.

—David Armstrong,  
Lethbridge, Alberta



To avoid overworking pie dough, put it in plastic before shaping it into a disk.

## Snack-size zip-top bags work in the freezer

I find that snack-size zip-top bags (they're about half the size of the sandwich bags) are very convenient when I want to freeze small amounts of anything: leftovers from a can of tomato paste or coconut milk, for example. I also use the snack-size bags to freeze portion-size amounts of stew, stock, or tomato sauce. To keep the small bags organized in the freezer and to protect them, I store them all together in one large heavy-gauge freezer bag.

—Anita Pandolfi,  
South Britain, CT

## Metal spoon protects glass from boiling liquids

As a frequent tea drinker who prefers glasses to cups, I've found that if I set a metal tea spoon in the glass before pouring in the hot water, the glass can withstand the high temperature. The glass does get hot, but the heat-conductive spoon absorbs the first blast of heat. So far, I've never had a

glass break on me using this method (and without the spoon, I have). I assume that this technique would apply to other instances in the kitchen, any time you might need to pour a very hot liquid into a non-Pyrex glass bowl or measuring cup that might otherwise crack from the heat.

—Carmen Perujo,  
Madrid, Spain

## To fill a pepper mill, try an envelope

When it's time to fill my salt shaker and pepper mill, I snip the corner off an envelope to make a fast, disposable funnel. I don't spill any salt or peppercorns this way, and I find that it's more convenient than hunting for a real funnel, whose narrow feed tube clogs up with peppercorns anyway.

—Kit Rollins,  
Cedarburg, WI

## Berries hide dings in a lemon tart

Recently I made Deborah Ponzek's excellent Lemon Tart with Walnut Crust (*Fine Cooking* #23, p. 37) to bring



Use a fine cheese grater to mince garlic cloves.

## Grating garlic

I use a cheese grater with tiny teardrop-shaped holes (the same size holes for grating Parmesan cheese) to mince or finely chop peeled garlic. The grater works faster than a knife and it's easier to clean than a garlic press.

—Mary Ann Cameron,  
Santa Clara, CA



A metal spoon helps glass withstand hot liquids.



to a party. Unfortunately, the tart's smooth, delicate top got scuffed in transit, bumping against the lid of the box in which I'd packed it. I came up with a quick solution that ended up being colorful and delicious, too: I studded the tart's top with red raspberries to hide the dings.

—Virginia Teichner,  
Ridgefield, CT

### Fingernail brush for hard-to-clean tools

I keep a small, stiff fingernail brush with my dishwashing supplies. I find that it's terrific for cleaning my garlic press, cheese and ginger graters, sieves, and any other tool with tiny pesky holes and crevices.

—Beverly Elliott, Philo, CA



To keep peppercorns contained while you crush them with a heavy pan, put a rimmed sheet pan under your cutting board.

### Crack peppercorns on a sheet pan

One popular way to crack peppercorns is to crush them

on a cutting board with the bottom of a heavy skillet, but I'm always chasing whole and cracked peppercorns that

have rolled and bounced off the board. Simple solution: Put the board on a rimmed sheet pan first. The peppercorns still roll off the board, but the pan catches them.

—Noah Thompson,  
Dallas

### Handle hot chiles with plastic bags

While seeding or chopping jalapeños or other hot chile peppers, I've often ended up with stinging eyes or a burning mouth after unwittingly touching my face. I've heard that some people don rubber gloves while working with hot chiles, but I just cover my hands with plastic bags.

—Sarah Richardson,  
Tucson, AZ ♦

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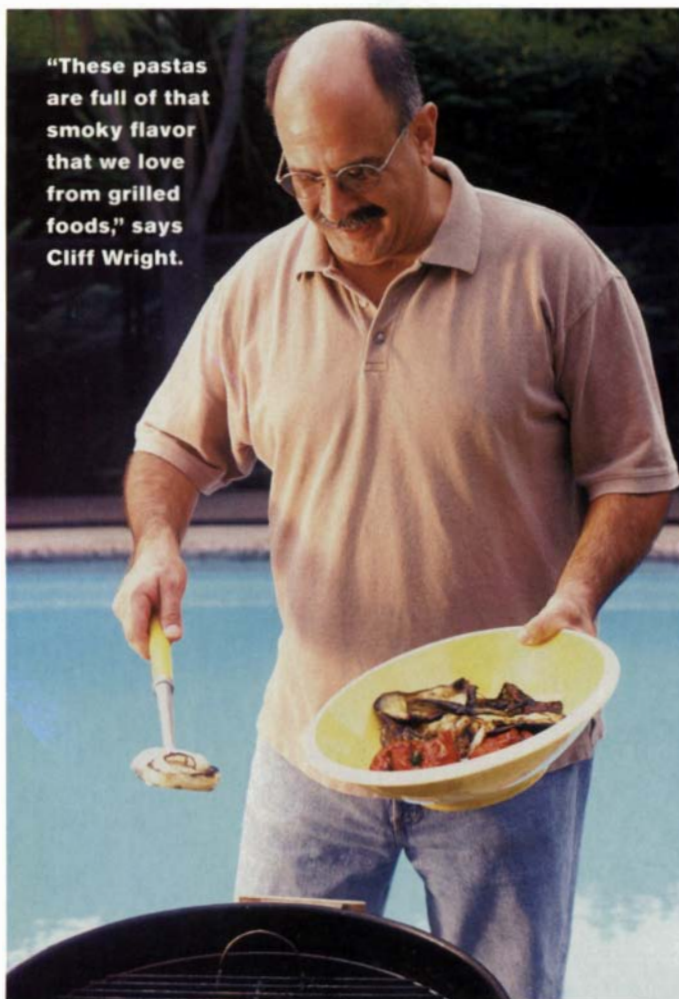
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READER SERVICE NO. 58

# Turn Grilled Vegetables into Savory Pasta Sauces



"These pastas are full of that smoky flavor that we love from grilled foods," says Cliff Wright.



**Eggplant, tomatoes, and onions hold their shape on the grill, but when tossed with spaghetti, they become meltingly saucelike, making an irresistible summer meal.**

Toss grilled vegetables, chicken, and fresh herbs with hot pasta for smoke-kissed summer suppers

**BY CLIFFORD A. WRIGHT**

Photos: Grey Crawford





**M**y favorite dishes are often the serendipitous ones—dishes that are born through happenstance and that sometimes end up surpassing anything I might have planned on. One group of dishes in my repertoire that came about this way is pasta tossed with grilled meats or vegetables. What began as a way to use grilled leftovers the day after a cookout has turned into a purposeful way of cooking.

All three recipes I'm including here are filled with that smoky, charred flavor that we love so much from grilled foods. And while they all have grilled ingredients tossed together, they all feel quite different because they're bound in different ways. The Penne with Grilled Chicken, Portabellas & Scallions uses olive oil and a little of the pasta boiling water to make a light but creamy emulsion to moisten and bind the

ingredients. In the Spaghetti with Grilled Eggplant, Tomato & Onion, the grilled vegetables collapse and become saucelike as they get tossed with the pasta. And the topping for Ravioli with Grilled Vegetable Sauce is a purée—a sauce in the classic sense.

#### **Use vegetables that hold up well on the grill**

Vegetables that are moist yet hold their shapes reasonably on the grill are my favorites for these pastas.

**Eggplant, mushrooms, tomatoes, zucchini, onions, asparagus, scallions, and bell peppers work best.** These vegetables stay relatively intact during grilling, yet they'll get soft enough to bond with the pasta when you toss. The one exception here is tomatoes, which usually do fall apart when you grill them. But when it comes to these pastas, a





**Grill onions and mushrooms until they're soft and branded with grill marks. Grill peppers until the skins are charred.**



**Purée the grilled vegetables and the tomatoes in a food processor.**

grilled tomato's fragile consistency is a big plus: soft, charred flesh and juice become saucelike and are transformed into a delicious dressing for the pasta.

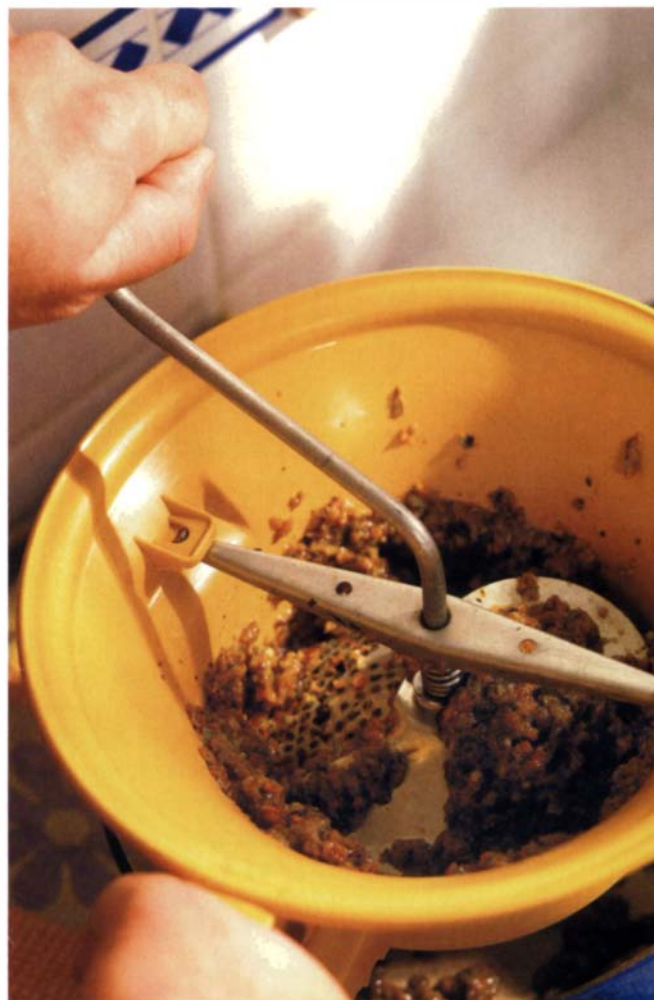
**Choose a pasta shape that's compatible with the ingredients you're adding.** For the Grilled Chicken on p. 26, I like tubular pasta such as penne or macaroni because it's about the same size as the sliced chicken and vegetables. Ingredients that are fall-apart-tender or that are chopped small, such as the Grilled Eggplant (recipe opposite), go best with filiform pastas such as spaghetti or fettuccine. The smooth, smoky Grilled Vegetable Sauce purée (recipe opposite) is best shown off by stuffed pastas such as tortellini, ravioli, manicotti, by small disk- or nugget-like pastas such as orecchiette or gnocchi, or by long, flat pastas like fettuccine.

#### **Build the fire to one side of the grill**

By pushing the coals to one side of the grill box, or to either side with a space in between, you'll have more control over the heat—one side will be very hot and the other side less intensely so. This way, you'll have a cooler spot to which you can move food that's flaring up or cooking too fast. If you have a gas grill with two burners, keep one side on high and the other on low, or use the shelf for food that needs a break from the heat.

When positioning sliced vegetables on the grill, set them perpendicular to the crossbars so you won't have to struggle to grasp them and so they're less likely to fall into the fire.

**Medium-high heat works best for grilling vegetables.** And because grills and flames vary, I suggest



**Pass the purée through a food mill or sieve. Use a wide or fine mesh, depending on the texture you want.**



paying close attention to how the grilled food looks to judge doneness, rather than sticking strictly to cooking times. For most of the vegetables in these recipes, perfectly cooked means nicely browned and tender all the way through. You'll notice in the recipes that I've included both a time window and words about appearance to gauge doneness.

**Be attentive (but not excessively fussy) when you're grilling the ingredients for these pastas.** Once the food is on the grill, turn it as infrequently as possible so that it will cook evenly and, if possible, be attractively striped with grill marks. Unless you have flare-ups and need to push the food to a spot where the flames are lower, you don't need to do a lot of fiddling. Chicken, mushrooms, and eggplant will need less attention than onions, peppers, scallions, and tomatoes.

## RECIPES

### Ravioli with Grilled Vegetable Sauce

This sauce recipe will cover two pounds of pasta, so you can freeze half to enjoy later. The sauce is also delicious over tortellini, gnocchi, or even polenta. *Yields 4 cups sauce; serves four with sauce left over.*

- 1 medium red onion, halved (skin on)
- 3 red bell peppers
- 2 yellow bell peppers
- 1 hot fresh green chile, such as jalapeño
- 1 portabella mushroom (4 to 5 inches in diameter), wiped clean, stem removed
- ½ medium eggplant, peeled and sliced ½ inch thick
- 2 cups (1 lb.) chopped tomatoes, preferably fresh plum tomatoes or Early Girls
- 3 cloves garlic
- 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil



**Simmer with olive oil and a little cream** until dense, smooth, and reduced to 4 cups of sauce, 30 to 40 minutes.

- ¼ cup heavy cream
- 1 lb. cheese ravioli
- Freshly grated Parmesan cheese (optional)

Prepare a medium-hot charcoal fire or heat a gas grill for 20 min. on high. Put the onion, peppers, chile, mushroom, and eggplant slices on the grill. Grill the onion until it can be easily pierced by a skewer (about 45 min.), the peppers and chile until charred black and the skins are blistering (about 20 min.), the mushroom until soft and golden brown (about 20 min.), and the eggplant until branded with grill marks (about 15 min.). When the peppers and chile are cool enough to handle, peel them and remove their seeds. Peel the onion. Put the onion, peppers, chile, eggplant, mushroom, chopped tomatoes, and garlic in a food processor. Process until the vegetables are a purée. Pass through a food mill or a strainer and transfer to a saucepan; stir in the olive oil and cream. Turn the heat to medium, bring to a gentle boil, and then simmer until the sauce is dense, smooth, and reduced to about 4 cups, 30 to 40 min. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of well-salted water to a vigorous boil and add the ravioli. Cook until the ravioli are puffy and bobbing on top of the water, pushing them down occasionally (if using frozen ravioli, follow the directions on the package). Test one to be sure it's fully cooked; drain and then cover with the sauce. Serve with freshly grated Parmesan cheese, if you like.

### Spaghetti with Grilled Eggplant, Tomato & Onion

Cooking times will be on the longer side if you're using a gas grill. *Serves four to six.*

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil; more for brushing
- 6 Tbs. finely chopped fresh basil
- 2 or 3 large cloves garlic, finely chopped
- ¼ cup crushed walnuts
- 1 tsp. salt; more to taste
- 1 medium eggplant (about 1 lb.), peeled and cut into ¾-inch slices

*(Ingredient list continues)*





**Penne with Grilled Chicken, Portabellas & Scallions will look its brightest if you toss the mushrooms in last so they don't discolor the other ingredients.**

**1 beefsteak tomato (about 1 lb.), halved**  
**1 medium onion, peeled and cut into 3 or 4 thick slices**  
**Freshly ground black pepper to taste**  
**1 lb. spaghetti**  
**Freshly grated Parmesan cheese (optional)**

Prepare a medium-hot charcoal fire or heat a gas grill for 20 min. on high. In a bowl, mix together the olive oil, basil, garlic, walnuts, and 1 tsp. salt. Brush the eggplant, tomato, and onion with more olive oil, season with salt and pepper, and put them on the grill. Grill the tomato, turning only once, until the skin is blistering and the flesh looks mushy and cooked, 15 to 25 min. Grill the onion until soft and blackened on both sides, about 15 min. Grill the eggplant until golden brown and tender, 10 to 25 min. Coarsely chop the eggplant, tomato, and onion; put them in a large bowl along with their juices. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of well-salted water to a vigorous boil and add the spaghetti. Cook until *al dente*; drain well. Toss the pasta with the vegetables and the basil mixture. Sprinkle with pepper; toss again and serve immediately, with freshly grated Parmesan cheese, if you like.

### **Penne with Grilled Chicken, Portabellas & Scallions**

Add the sliced portabellas and croutons at the last minute, and toss gently so the mushrooms don't give a gray cast to the other elements in the dish. Save the portabella stems for grilling another time. *Serves four.*

**5 portabella mushrooms (4 to 5 inches in diameter), wiped clean, stems removed**  
**1½ lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts**  
**16 thin scallions, trimmed**  
**7 large ½-inch slices Italian or French bread (if you're using a skinny loaf, cut on the diagonal for larger slices, or use more slices)**  
**About ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil; more for brushing**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**  
**¼ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**  
**3 large cloves garlic, finely chopped**  
**½ lb. penne**  
**Freshly grated Parmesan cheese (optional)**

Prepare a medium-hot charcoal fire or heat a gas grill for 20 min. on high. Brush the mushrooms, chicken, scallions, and bread liberally with olive oil; season with salt and pepper. In a large bowl, stir the parsley, garlic, and 3 Tbs. of the olive oil together. Grill the mushrooms until flattened and golden brown (15 to 30 min.), the chicken until streaked golden brown and springy to the touch but still moist inside (10 to 12 min.), the scallions until slightly blackened (about 5 min.), and the bread until golden brown (about 5 min.), turning everything as you grill. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of well-salted water to a vigorous boil and add the pasta. Cook until *al dente*; drain, reserving about 1 cup of the pasta liquid for tossing with the pasta. Slice the grilled mushrooms and chicken thinly to about the same size as the penne; chop the scallions into ½-inch lengths. Crumble the toasted bread. Add the pasta, chicken, and scallions to the dressing in the bowl and toss. Add ¼ cup olive oil and about ½ cup of the reserved pasta water to moisten the pasta, using more or less water as needed. Finally, add the portabellas and the crumbled toasted bread. Season with salt and pepper. Serve with freshly grated Parmesan cheese, if you like.

*Cliff Wright's latest books are Italian Pure & Simple (William Morrow) and Grill Italian (Macmillan). He lives in Santa Monica, California. ♦*

## **Add texture and flavor to grilled pasta dishes**

When it's time to toss the grilled ingredients with the pasta, consider reaching into your pantry for condiments and seasonings that will add even more flavor and texture to the finished dish. Garlic, of course, is a natural, but here are more tasty complements to the smoky sweetness of these grilled pastas.

♦ **For fresh herb flavor**, stir in chopped basil, mint, parsley, oregano, marjoram, rosemary, or fennel leaves.

♦ **For heat or zip**, add freshly crushed black pepper, dried red chile flakes, crushed fennel seed, or green peppercorns.

♦ **For crunch and texture**, try walnuts, chopped roasted almonds, pine nuts, grilled chunks of peasant bread, or crisped, chopped pancetta or bacon.

♦ **For a salty-briny kick**, toss in some chopped black or green olives or capers. Sardines or salted anchovies are particularly good with grilled shellfish.



# Southern Fried Chicken

No fancy batter, just  
pure chicken flavor  
beneath a crisp and  
golden skin

BY NANCIE McDERMOTT

My grandmother, Nancy Lloyd Suitt, of Hillsborough, North Carolina, taught me how to fry chicken in her farmhouse kitchen. As a child, I loved to stand on a chair beside her at the stove and watch her put a big batch of chicken in the pan to fry. At first she worked over a woodstove, but by the mid-1960s, an electric range had taken its place. Either way, the pan was a big, black, cast-iron skillet, and the chicken was fresh from her henhouse.

Her chickens were small, sturdy, and lean, akin to today's free-range chickens. (Back then "free-range" wasn't a word we used; hunting and pecking freely around the barnyard was just what chickens *did*.)

For my fried chicken, I generally buy a whole broiler-fryer, free-range when I can find it. (For more on fryers vs. roasters, see Basics, p. 68.) I like to cut the chicken into pieces myself so I can use the neck and giblets for making stock, and I love nibbling on crispy, fried wings. But if I'm feeding a crowd, I'll buy one of those "best of the fryer" packs that contain more of the favored pieces: breasts, legs, and thighs.

## **You'll need one good, heavy pan—maybe two**

My grandmother's wiry chickens were more likely to fit in one skillet than the buxom superchickens we find in today's supermarkets. Unless you're only frying a few pieces—and why bother doing *that* as long as you're already making a mess?—you'll need either one very large, heavy skillet or two medium ones to fry a whole chicken. I prefer a big, heavy, cast-iron skillet for frying because it's so efficient at absorbing and maintaining the heat. But any heavy-based pan will do the job: just be sure it's deep enough to contain the fat and broad enough to hold the chicken



**Amazing how something so simple can taste so good. Make this recipe once, and you'll have it down.**





**A simple flour coating helps the chicken brown beautifully. Shake off any excess flour before frying.**



**When a bit of flour “blooms,” the oil is ready for the chicken.**

**Start the chicken skin side down.** As the pieces cook, position them at different angles to brown all sides.

pieces without crowding. If you don't have two heavy pans, cook the chicken in batches. If you cheat and try to squeeze in too many pieces, you'll be punished with chicken that takes forever to cook and—worse—whose skin is flabby, not crisp.

I sometimes pull out my great big electric frying pan when I'm making an extra-big batch. It does a fine job, and it frees up the stove for the potatoes, green beans, and sweet corn that keep my fried chicken company at the table.

### **A simple coating and then into the pan**

Many fried chicken recipes call for all sorts of elaborate batters. Those are great—if you like fried batter. My recipe (if you can even call it that, it's so simple) is all about the chicken. A quick dredge in flour seasoned amply with salt and pepper is all the coating my chicken gets. This way, the delicious flavor of the crisp skin and tender meat prevails. Many cooks add paprika or garlic powder or both to the flour mixture. That's fine with me. I can live with most variations, except those that add a whole lot of work.

Use enough fat to come about halfway up the chicken pieces, about  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch. Before you put

the chicken in, let the fat get hot enough so that when you drop in a pinch of flour, it “blooms” or swells at once, or a cube of bread sizzles on contact and browns in just under a minute, about 365°F. (Set your electric pan at 375°F, but give the oil the same test.) Lard—rendered and clarified pork fat—was once the favorite cooking fat for the southern kitchen, but solid vegetable shortening made its way into the pantry several generations ago and has gained loyal followers. Liquid oils work well, too, but choose those with a high smoke point, such as peanut, corn, canola, grapeseed, or safflower. Avoid olive oil; I think its smoke point is too low.

### **Give each piece the attention it deserves**

If the chickens, the stove, and, in most cases, the fat and the pans have changed over time, it makes sense that the cooking times have, too. Old southern recipes allow 25 to 30 minutes for the entire cooking process. Today's chickens will usually need more time than that. Yet the traditional formula still serves me well: an initial browning of all of the pieces in very hot fat, followed by a longer cooking session at a somewhat lower heat. Some recipes suggest cover-

ing the pan at this time—not this one. While that may keep your stove a little cleaner, I find you get crisper chicken with an uncovered pan. A good pair of tongs will give you some distance from the sputtering fat while allowing you to easily turn each piece of chicken so it gets evenly browned and cooked.

The meat is done if the juices run clear and there's no pinkness when you cut it to the bone. A meat thermometer is really handy here; look for an internal temperature of



**Stay near the stove and turn the pieces every five minutes.**



180°F. Each piece will cook a little differently. Most likely the legs and wings will be done first, big thighs last, and breasts—who knows? Breasts used to cook more quickly than thighs, but today's big-bosomed chickens have changed that old rule. As each piece is done, transfer it to a brown paper bag to drain any excess fat. Don't pile up the chicken until you're ready to serve it or it will "sweat" and soften.

Expect the stove to end up with a dewlike coating of grease when the job is done. This mess is worth the little trouble it takes to clean up and can be wiped away in the time it takes to say, "Would y'all kindly pass me another piece of that chicken?" The kitchen smells like fried chicken the next morning, too, but the aroma is gone by supper time. Too bad.

## RECIPE

### Simple Southern Fried Chicken

To fry a whole chicken, you'll need one very large, heavy skillet, preferably cast-iron, or two medium skillets. If you use two pans, adjust the amount of shortening as needed to yield  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch in each pan. *Serves four.*

**$\frac{2}{3}$  cup all-purpose flour**

**2 tsp. salt**

**1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper**

**$3\frac{1}{2}$ - to 4-lb. chicken, cut into serving pieces**

**$\frac{3}{4}$  cup solid vegetable shortening, such as Crisco; more if needed**

In a large, shallow bowl or plate, mix the flour, salt, and pepper well with a fork. Rinse each chicken piece, pat dry, and dredge in the flour mixture to coat it well. Tap to remove excess flour. Set aside on a large plate.

In a large cast-iron skillet or other deep, heavy frying pan, heat the shortening over medium-high heat until sizzling hot but not smoking. Test the fat with a pinch of flour; if it "blooms" at once, it's ready.

Using tongs, carefully put the floured chicken pieces in the hot fat, skin side down, without crowding the pan. Let the chicken cook until lightly browned on one side, about 5 min. Turn each piece and brown again, about 5 min. Reduce the heat slightly and continue frying, turning occasionally to brown evenly.

Arrange the wings, breasts, and legs at different angles as needed, turning the pieces about every 5 min. to cook and brown evenly and prevent scorching. Fry until the chicken is cooked through, 20 to 25 min. after the initial browning (for a total of 30 to 35 min.). Check for doneness using a meat thermometer (it should read 180°F) or cut through to the bone: the juices should run clear and there should be no pinkness. Remove each piece as it's done, setting it on clean brown paper grocery bags or paper towels to drain. Pile the cooked, drained pieces on a serving platter and serve it hot, warm, or at room temperature.

*Nancie McDermott is a cooking instructor and food writer. Her books include Real Thai (Chronicle) and The 5 in 10 Pasta & Noodle Cookbook (Hearst).* ♦

## Gravy for supper, not for picnics

The main reason for making gravy after frying chicken is that it would be such a shame not to. You've created the main flavor ingredient—pan drippings—for which there is no substitute. Another reason is that you really should be serving the chicken with such classic sides as biscuits, mashed potatoes, or rice, all of which cry out for the sweet southern baptism of cream gravy. In tight economic times, gravy was also a way to stretch the meal, helping to prolong the chicken flavor even after the bird was reduced to bones. Finally, because many people think that gravy this delicious must be hard to make (it isn't), you'll receive tremendous appreciation for your handiwork.

Although the gravy is just fabulous, the chicken is still delicious without it. In fact, when we take fried chicken along on picnics, we leave out the decidedly unportable gravy, and we don't look back.

### Old-Fashioned Cream Gravy

Whatever you do, don't pour the gravy over the chicken before serving it or its lovely crisp skin will turn soggy. *Yields about 2 cups.*

**2 Tbs. reserved chicken grease**

**2 Tbs. all-purpose flour**

**2 cups milk or water**

**$\frac{3}{4}$  tsp. salt**

**$\frac{3}{4}$  tsp. freshly ground black pepper**

Right after frying the chicken, slowly and carefully drain off the grease into a heatproof bowl, keeping as many of the browned bits behind in the frying pan as you can. Slowly pour the grease into another heatproof bowl to capture any stray brown bits left behind in the original grease bowl and return the bits back to the pan. Add 2 Tbs. of the grease back to the pan as well.

Heat the pan over medium-low heat until hot. Add the flour and stir well for 1 to 2 min., scraping up the brown bits. Add the milk or water and increase the heat to medium. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the gravy comes to a gentle boil. Simmer, stirring often, until the gravy is smooth, shiny, and thickened. Stir in the salt and pepper, adding more seasonings to taste. Transfer to a serving bowl and serve at once.

Add flour to the tasty brown bits.

Cook the flour until the foam subsides.

Stir as you pour.

Cook until it's thick enough to coat a spoon.

# Crunchy Slaw, a Cool

Alongside burgers, ribs, or fried chicken, versatile slaw offers a fresh, crisp counterpoint

BY DAVID PAGE & BARBARA SHINN

An oyster po' boy got us thinking about cole slaw. Our version of the famous fried oyster sandwich (which hasn't left the menu since the day we opened our first restaurant) cried out for a light, bright accompaniment. The crunchy texture and tangy flavor of a slaw made with julienned apples and fennel was the perfect balance to the sweet oysters and the rich basil mayonnaise that topped them.

Slaw with fried foods is a classic combination. But slaws also work their magic on all kinds of rich and full-flavored foods, from barbecued ribs to grilled salmon. Making slaw at home is actually quite easy—a matter of slicing or shredding vegetables and tossing them with a dressing. What results is a colorful salad full of fresh, crisp flavors that you can tailor to suit your taste and the meal.

## Cabbage is traditional but not essential

Cabbage makes a wonderful slaw ingredient. In fact, cole slaw comes from the Dutch *kool sla*—a cabbage salad. The word *kool* actually means cabbage and is not, as many people who ask for “cold slaw” believe, a suggestion for the temperature at which the salad should be served (although most are indeed served cold). On the practical side, one head of cabbage makes a lot of slaw. We're always amazed at how one compact head of cabbage can unravel into bowlfuls of shredded leaves. And fresh raw cabbage has a subtle, spicy-sweet flavor and a pleasing crunch.

We usually use Savoy cabbage (the one with the ruffled blue-green leaves) in slaw, mainly because it's what the farmers seem to be growing out on



**A chef's knife works best for cabbage.** Cut it in quarters and then into 1/4-inch slices.

**A simple box grater can shred carrots.** A food processor with a shredding disk will also do the trick.

Photos: Steve Hunter



# Foil to Robust Foods

the North Fork of Long Island where we live. Savoy cabbage has a more delicate flavor than other cabbages, and its leaves are tender yet crisp. Regular green cabbage, also called Dutch white, is great in cole slaw and is what's traditionally used. Although we seem to cook red cabbage more often than we serve it raw, it also works in a cole slaw (though its bright purple color can be a little overwhelming).

Whatever variety you choose, look for firm, tightly packed heads with no signs of browning. They should feel heavy for their size.

To soften sturdy cabbage, we either soak the shredded leaves in salted water or cook them lightly, as in our Warm Cabbage Slaw with Country Ham. Salt and heat help break down the fibers of the plant, making the leaves more supple.

But don't limit yourself to cabbage-only slaws. Other vegetables, and even fruits, can make wonderful slaws, either in addition to cabbage or on their own. The only rule regarding what makes a vegetable or fruit a good slaw candidate is that it should hold up well once it's tossed in its dressing; slaws are meant to last a while, which is why they're great picnic food. For a refreshingly different kind of slaw, try our Apple & Fennel Slaw.

## **Dress your slaw, and then let it sit**

The dressing, which can be a simple mix of oil and vinegar or made creamy with

the addition of mayonnaise, sour cream, buttermilk, or yogurt, holds the slaw together, giving it flavor and character.

Vinegar is a traditional dressing ingredient for slaw. Aside from adding its own sharp flavor, the acid in the vinegar softens the vegetables, allowing the other seasonings in the dish to permeate them.

The best flavor emerges over time. If you're in a hurry for a side dish, you can toss a slaw together and serve it right away. But if you have the time, allow the slaw to marinate in the dressing. The vegetables will become a little softer and the flavors deeper. *(Recipes follow)*



**A mandoline cuts precisely.** A fancy metal one is nice; the authors also use an inexpensive plastic model.

**Two takes on slaw.** Both traditional cabbage (front) and apple-fennel are crunchy and tasty.





## Traditional Cole Slaw

This colorful cabbage slaw is the perfect companion to barbecued ribs, burgers on the grill, and fried chicken. *Yields 8 cups; serves eight to ten.*

**½ head Savoy or Dutch white cabbage, shredded (about 4½ cups)**  
**2 cups water**  
**1 Tbs. salt**  
**2 medium carrots, shredded (about 1 cup)**  
**7 scallions, finely chopped (about ⅔ cup)**  
**3 Tbs. apple-cider vinegar**  
**2 Tbs. sugar**  
**3 to 4 Tbs. sour cream**  
**½ tsp. celery seed**  
**½ tsp. caraway seed**  
**Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste**

In a medium stainless-steel bowl, soak the cabbage in the water and salt for half an hour. Drain the cabbage, rinse it, and drain any excess water. Toss the cabbage with the remaining ingredients and refrigerate for 1 to 2 hours to allow the flavors to meld. Let stand at room temperature for 15 min. before serving.

## Apple & Fennel Slaw

In the winter, we replace the apples with segmented tangerines and add chives instead of parsley—a delicious variation. *Yields 8 cups; serves eight to ten.*

**2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice**  
**3 tart apples (we like Gravensteins)**  
**2 small heads fennel, cut into matchsticks**  
**1 small red onion, cut in half and very thinly sliced**  
**¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**  
**2 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**  
**Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste**



**A cooked slaw gets tossed right in the pan.** Though warm, it still has some crunch.

Put the lemon juice in a large bowl. Cut one of the apples in half, core it, and julienne it. Put the cut apple in the bowl and toss it with the lemon juice to keep it from browning. Repeat with the other apples. Toss in all of the remaining ingredients. Let stand for at least 20 min. at room temperature. Taste for seasoning and serve.

## Warm Cabbage Slaw with Country Ham

If you can get your hands on some real country ham, such as a Smithfield, you'll love it in this slaw. Prosciutto sliced a little thicker than usual makes a great substitute. *Yields 4 cups; serves four to six.*

**1 Tbs. olive oil**  
**4½ tsp. apple-cider vinegar**  
**1½ tsp. prepared whole-grain mustard**  
**1 tsp. sugar**

**½ tsp. ground mustard seed**  
**½ small yellow onion, thinly sliced**  
**½ head Savoy cabbage, shredded (about 4½ cups)**  
**1½ oz. Smithfield ham or prosciutto, julienned**  
**1½ tsp. chopped fresh mint**  
**Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste**

In a large skillet, heat the oil, vinegar, whole-grain mustard, sugar, and ground mustard, stirring to mix. Add the onion and cabbage and cook, tossing to mix, until warmed through, 3 to 5 min. Toss in the ham and mint. Season with salt and pepper and serve warm.

*David Page and Barbara Shinn own two restaurants in New York City, Home and Drovers Tap Room, as well as Home Away from Home, a takeout store featuring items from both restaurants. ♦*

## Improvise a slew of slaws

We're always making up different slaw combinations—fennel and tangerines one season, artichokes and turnips another. We even feature a slaw-like appetizer made with shredded apples, and jicama, tossed in a tangy buttermilk dressing and finished with smoked trout. What does this mean to you? It means you should have fun and experiment with slaw using your own favorite flavors. Here's how:

### 1. Choose your vegetables.

While there are countless recipes for cole slaws featuring cabbage, there are also infinite ways to make slaw without it. We often use crisp, tart apples in slaws; they're great with cabbage, as well as with jicama, carrots, and fennel. Other good slaw candidates include onions, peppers, pears, celery, radishes, string beans, snap peas, and very thinly sliced root vegetables.

### 2. Consider other flavorful additions.

Cured or smoked meat or fish, sections of citrus or pineapple, nuts, raisins, and other dried fruit can add flavor and texture to your slaw.

### 3. Toss in a dressing.

The dressing can be as simple as a lemon juice and olive oil vinaigrette or a more involved buttermilk or mayonnaise-style dressing. Try some of your favorite salad dressings.

### 4. Season with herbs and spices.

Spices, such as caraway seed, celery seed, mustard seed, and poppy seed, and fresh herbs, such as parsley, chives, mint, dill, and tarragon, can all add pizzazz to a slaw. And don't forget ample salt and freshly ground pepper.



# Roast Tomatoes

## Low and Slow for Intense Flavor

Turn ripe tomatoes into a versatile condiment—and show it off in a summery goat cheese, basil, and tomato terrine

BY STEPHEN KALT



**Covered in oil and refrigerated, the tomatoes keep for weeks.**

**T**here's only one ingredient I couldn't do without in my Mediterranean restaurants—my tomatoes. These aren't just plain tomatoes, however, but what I call tomato "confit." I roast beefsteak tomatoes in oil, which slowly intensifies their flavor by reducing the moisture content and caramelizing the juices without drying them out completely. The result: a soft, intensely flavored piece of tomato that can be used as a condiment or a main ingredient. In fact, I like them so much that I pair them with nearly everything I cook, from pastas to pizzas.

The secret to these tomatoes is a generous coating of olive oil and a low oven. First I peel, quarter, and seed beefsteak tomatoes so that I'm left with just tomato flesh. (As a shortcut, you can use seeded, unskinned, halved plum tomatoes, though the finished

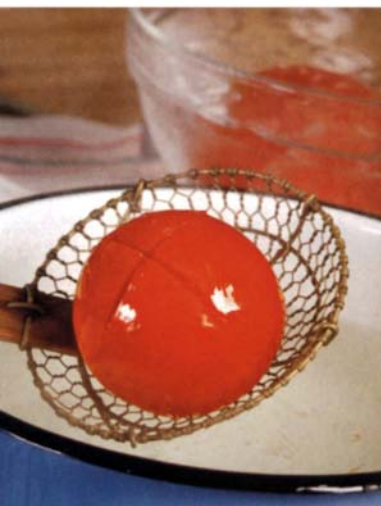


confit won't be as delicate). Then I coat the tomato flesh generously with olive oil, spreading the pieces evenly flat across a baking sheet. At the restaurant, I put them in a 225°F convection oven; the circulating air helps cook them evenly. At home, I cook them just shy of 300°F (try 275°F if you think your oven runs hot). I say that because ideally the tomatoes won't brown or blacken, though they will deepen in

**Serve a slice of summer. A tomato, basil, and goat cheese terrine, sliced and drizzled with a niçoise olive vinaigrette, makes a vibrant starter.**

Photos: Martha Holmberg

## Beefsteak tomatoes make the best “confit”



**Blanch scored and cored tomatoes** in boiling water for 20 to 30 seconds. Cool in ice water, peel, and quarter.



**Cut away the seed sacs and inner ribs** from the tomatoes; use the seeds in a stock or soup.



**Arrange the tomatoes** in a sheet pan, flatten slightly, sprinkle with salt, and coat with olive oil.



**Roast in a low oven** until shrunken and deeply colored. They'll be quite pliable.

color, before they're reduced to about a third of their original thickness; this will take about 2½ to 3 hours. When done, the tomatoes will be shrunken and wrinkled but still somewhat moist on the inside (unlike sun-dried or oven-dried tomatoes) since the olive oil bath has helped them retain some moisture. Their flavor will be intense and earthy, somewhat sweet and somewhat tangy. Once the tomatoes are cool, I store them in the fridge for up to two weeks. When I store them, I cover the tomatoes with olive oil, using any oil that's left over from roasting and topping it off with fresh olive oil if needed.

Use the tomatoes whole, sliced, or chopped in many dishes. For example, I always have a pasta on the menu—like tagliatelle with chicken, wild mushrooms, and artichokes—that includes these tomatoes. And in one of my most popular dishes, a Tomato, Goat Cheese & Basil Terrine (recipe opposite), the tomatoes are a main ingredient. But mostly I try to respect the delicate texture and great flavor of these tomatoes by treating them as a highlight to a dish and not messing with them too much. This means I don't usually cook them again; rather, I might fold them into a dish like polenta or risotto towards the end of cooking, or more often, I might just arrange the room-temperature tomatoes alongside a piece of grilled fish or a lamb chop and let diners use the confit as a condiment. Sometimes I dice, chop, or slice them to add to a salad or a sandwich. I think the flavor is best appreciated when the confit is at room temperature (don't serve the tomatoes straight from the refrigerator), but you can gently warm them on a baking sheet in the oven, if you like.

The intense flavor and silky texture of these tomatoes can really pick up many dishes. For just a few ideas on how to use them, see the sidebar on p. 35.

### RECIPES

#### Tomato “Confit” (Slow-Roasted Tomatoes)

I like to use beefsteak tomatoes for this recipe, although I'm careful to use them when they're just ripe—overripe tomatoes don't yield great results. I've also substituted halved, seeded plum tomatoes in a pinch with good results. *Yields 40 pieces.*

**10 ripe medium-large beefsteak tomatoes (about 8 oz. each)**  
**Coarse salt**  
**½ cup olive oil**

Heat the oven to 300°F. Fill a large bowl with ice and water. Core the tomatoes and use a sharp knife to score the bottoms with an X. Blanch a few tomatoes at a time for 20 to 30 seconds in boiling water. Remove and shock in ice water for 2 min. Start peeling the tomatoes, returning each to the cold water until all are peeled. Quarter the tomatoes and remove the seeds and interior flesh so that just the thick outer flesh is left. (Use a paring knife to carve out insides.) Lay the tomato pieces (seeded side down) flat on a parchment-lined 13x18-inch rimmed baking sheet or jelly roll pan; press down to flatten slightly. Sprinkle lightly with coarse salt and cover with the olive oil. Be sure all the tomato pieces are well coated in oil. Don't worry if they're crowded together; they'll shrink when cooking.

Roast the tomatoes until they're shrunken to one-third their original thickness, 2½ to 3 hours. (You may need to remove the tomatoes in stages, as some will be done before others.) Occasionally turn the pan around in the oven to cook the tomatoes evenly. If the edges are turning black, reduce the oven temperature to 275°F. When done, they'll be wrinkled, flat, and thin, but they'll retain some of their moisture inside. The color will have darkened to a brick red.

Let the tomatoes cool and then store them in the refrigerator (covered in olive oil) for up to two weeks.



## Tomato “Confit,” Basil & Goat Cheese Terrine

This is one of my favorite uses for slow-roasted tomatoes. The terrine isn't hard to assemble (use a disposable foil mini loaf pan), but it can be tricky to slice. I use an electric slicer. If you don't have one, try using dental floss to cut nice, even slices while the terrine is still very cold (slide a 12-inch piece of floss under the terrine, bring the two ends of floss over the terrine, cross them, leading each back to the direction it came from, and pull each end sharply and quickly to “garrote” a slice.) A very thin, very sharp knife run under hot water is the next best option. In addition to the serving idea in the recipe, I like to serve the terrine with bread or crackers, almost like a spread. *Serves ten as an appetizer.*

**6 oz. fresh goat cheese**

**36 to 40 slow-roasted tomato pieces (recipe at left)**

**½ cup Basil Purée (recipe below)**

**Niçoise Vinaigrette (recipe at right)**

**Salad greens and toast as accompaniments**

Spray a disposable aluminum-foil mini loaf pan (5¾x3¼x2 inches) with nonstick spray (or lightly grease it) and line it snugly with plastic wrap, leaving about 4 inches hanging over each long side. Put the goat cheese in a small, heatproof bowl and warm it just enough (in a warm oven for 3 to 5 min. or on the back of a gas range that stays warm from a pilot light) so that it reaches a soft, spreadable consistency; use a small rubber spatula to stir and smooth it out as it's warming.

Arrange a layer of the tomatoes (wrinkled side down) along the bottom of the loaf pan, laying them lengthwise, slightly overlapping; 6 to 8 will fit across the bottom. Drop 2½ Tbs. of the goat cheese in dollops over tomatoes. To spread the goat cheese out into a nice thin layer, use a mini spatula or one or two fingers covered with plastic wrap. Spread 2 tsp. of the basil purée over the goat cheese in the same way. Repeat three more sets of these three layers—tomato, cheese, basil—and finish with a layer of tomatoes. Cover the top of the terrine with the excess plastic wrap and press down gently. Cover and refrigerate for at least 6 hours and up to 24 hours.

To slice and serve the terrine, unwrap the top layer of plastic, cover the terrine with a cutting board, and flip both over to gently force the terrine out. Remove the plastic. Use an electric knife, dental floss, a thin wire, or a very sharp knife run under hot water to slice pieces about ½ inch thick. Serve the slices with a small mound of greens and a light drizzle of the vinaigrette. A few slices of toasted bread are good accompaniments, too.

### Basil Purée

Blanching the basil before puréeing it will help the herb retain some of its bright green color. *Yields about ½ cup purée.*

**3 cups lightly packed basil leaves (about 2½ oz.)**

**2 to 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**

**Pinch salt**

Fill a medium bowl with ice water. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and blanch the basil for 20 seconds. Dunk the basil in the ice water for a few seconds. Drain well and gently squeeze out excess moisture with towels. Put the basil in a food processor (a mini one works well) with 2 Tbs. of the olive oil. Purée well, adding more olive oil if needed to chop finely. To drain the excess oil, put the purée in a coffee cup or a custard cup lined with a paper coffee filter or cheesecloth for 15 to 20 min. Reserve the basil oil, if you like, to garnish the finished terrine.

### Niçoise Vinaigrette

*Yields ¾ cup.*

**2 Tbs. black olive purée or minced pitted niçoise or other black olives**

**2 anchovy fillets, rinsed and minced**

**1 Tbs. finely chopped capers**

**½ tsp. finely minced garlic**

**½ tsp. finely chopped shallots**

**3 to 4 Tbs. sherry vinegar**

**6 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**

In a shallow bowl, combine the olive purée, anchovies, capers, garlic, shallots, and 3 Tbs. of the vinegar. Whisk in the oil until well combined. Add more vinegar to taste.



**A mini spatula makes it easy to spread a layer of basil purée in the terrine. Or use one or two fingers, wrapped in plastic, to spread smoothly.**

## Add complex flavor with tomato “confit”

◆ For an appetizer or first course, layer the tomato pieces with sliced fresh mozzarella (drained of excess moisture) and basil leaves. Drizzle with olive oil and a dash of balsamic vinegar or lemon juice.

◆ Make a sandwich of sliced grilled chicken, crisp arugula, Gorgonzola, and sliced tomato confit on sour-dough bread.

◆ When making polenta, fold in thinly sliced or chopped pieces of tomato confit just as the polenta is coming away from the sides of the pan. For a richer flavor, mix a bit of mascarpone cheese into the polenta before adding the tomatoes.

◆ Serve room temperature or slightly warmed whole pieces of tomato confit as a condiment

alongside grilled fish, seared lamb chops, or roasted asparagus.

◆ Finish a saffron-scented risotto by folding in tomato confit, diced or slivered, at the end of cooking. Garnish with sliced toasted almonds.

◆ Use tomato confit as a crostini topping. Toast baguette slices, top with warmed goat cheese, a basil or mint leaf, and tomato confit.

◆ Make an antipasto of thinly sliced prosciutto, a few niçoise olives, and whole pieces of tomato confit. Drizzle all with a good olive oil and serve with crusty bread.

◆ Chop the tomatoes roughly and whisk or blend together with olive oil and balsamic or sherry vinegar for a delicious vinaigrette.

*Stephen Kalt is the chef-owner of Spartina and Spazzia in New York City. ◆*

# Grilling Clams and Oysters

Toss some shellfish on the grill for quick cooking, easy opening, and delicious flavor

BY SAM HAYWARD

Clams and oysters don't immediately come to mind when you're firing up the grill, yet they're practically designed for grilling. Think about it: their hard, curved shells protect the tender meat inside as they cook, holding not only the bivalves' own tasty liquor but also whatever sauce or garnish you bestow upon them. Plus, their sweet, salty flavors go wonderfully well with the smoky flavor from the fire. Once you try this technique, I'm sure you'll add it to your grilling repertoire.

## Let the grill do the shucking

When I prepare shellfish for the grill, I usually shuck them first, as I would for serving them raw, with the meat resting in the curved shell. With the top shell off, I can most accurately gauge how quickly they're cooking. But since I've spent many, many years handling shellfish, shucking is probably easier for me than it is for most home cooks. Fortunately, one of the great things about grilling clams and oysters is that you can use the heat of the grill to coax their shells open. But you'll want to watch the shellfish carefully because by the time the shells open up completely—as they go from a crack to a maw—the meat inside may have overcooked; this is especially true for oysters.

For best results, be diligent and wield a pair of good tongs. (I use spring-action stainless-steel tongs that are about nine inches long.) As soon as a bivalve begins to gape, help it along by wedging the tongs between the two shells. This is easier to do if you take them off the grill. Use a thick kitchen towel or a mitt to protect your hand as you work (see the photo on the next page). Once the shell is open, you can better judge the



**Set the clams (or oysters or mussels) on a medium-hot grill;** Sam Hayward uses sturdy tongs to do the job. Other things to have handy: an oven mitt or a heavy towel, plates or a platter, your sauce, and a small ladle or spoon.



**Let the heat of the grill open the clams.** As the mollusks open, the edges of their meat will begin to curl and the natural juices will begin to simmer. Cook them until the meat feels slightly firm and warm to the touch.



cooking. Be sure to take the mollusks off the heat as soon as the meat begins to firm and the edges curl.

### Choose hard-shelled clams and oysters

Most types of oysters are good for grilling because they all have relatively hard shells. I've noticed that some varieties with heavily pocked shells—Spinney Creeks from Maine, for example—are more fragile and tend to crumble with the heat. If you have a choice, avoid this type.

Good clams for grilling are our northern hard clams, harvested from Atlantic Canada to the American South, but associated most strongly with New England's seafood traditions. They're categorized according to size: littlenecks (the smallest), countnecks, cherrystones, and quahogs or chowder clams (the largest). I like countnecks and cherrystones for the grill because they're big enough to be worth my while yet they're not as tough as chowder clams. Never grill steamer clams directly over a fire: their shells are much too fragile for grilling.

**Mussels are also great on the grill.** Mussels, which I never shuck before grilling, work nearly as well as oysters and clams. Their only drawback is that, because they tend to be thinner, they can easily fall between the grates. At home, I grill mussels in a grilling basket, but they also cook perfectly well on one of those steel cooking grids.

Be sure to clean all shellfish before grilling. All mollusks should be washed well with a stiff brush under cool running water before grilling. Pay extra attention to the hinge, which often collects natural marine muck and mud.



**Use tongs to open the shellfish fully.** Oysters especially may overcook before gaping wide, like these clams. Transfer the cooked bivalves to the serving platter, trying not to spill any of their juices.

### A hot—but not too-hot—fire

When grilling bivalves, the heat of the fire must not be extreme. Oyster shell material is deposited by the mollusk in layers, producing a laminated shell that can shatter or even explode if the heat is extreme. (Never drop oyster shells directly into the coals, and use tongs to quickly remove any shells that do fall into the fire.) For this reason, the grill's heat should be medium hot at most. To test for the proper heat, hold your palm an inch or two above the grate. The heat is about right when you can hold your hand there for two seconds before you have to pull it away.

I build my fire with a chimney starter, which I prefer to liquid starter—no residual petroleum aromas. (If you don't have a chimney starter, get one; they're inexpensive and convenient.) I also prefer lump or natural hardwood charcoal to traditional briquettes. For my 27-inch Weber grill, I fill a 12x7½-inch chimney starter to the brim with natural charcoal. When the coals are uniformly glowing, I turn the contents of the chimney into the grill and spread them evenly, a rather sparse distribution that's perfect for bivalves.

Of course, you can cook the shellfish on a gas grill, but you won't get the great smoky flavor a true fire delivers.

### Serve with melted butter, cocktail sauce, or one of the following recipes

Grilled shellfish make wonderful appetizers. At a casual gathering, friends can gather around and enjoy the clams and oysters as they come off the grill. For a more formal presentation, the bivalves may be briefly reheated with their sauce and then put on a plate or platter. Plain melted butter is a fine, traditional accompaniment. The garlic butter recipe that follows, however, is a showstopper. For a bright, peppery kick, try the *verjus* version of the classic mignonette. Other toppings you might consider include your favorite barbecue sauce, freshly made pesto, a curry vinaigrette, or a sprinkling of bacon and parsley. *(Continued)*



**Sauce the clams right off the grill.** Serve them very hot (reheat briefly on the grill, if necessary) once they're sauced. This delicious garlic-butter sauce begs for plenty of crusty country bread for dipping.

## Garlic-Butter Sauce for Oysters, Clams & Mussels

You can make the flavored butter ahead of time; wrap it in plastic in a log shape and refrigerate it. *Yields about 1½ cups.*

**5 oz. (10 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature**

**12 cloves garlic**

**1 cup dry white wine**

**1½ tsp. white-wine vinegar**

**2 Tbs. heavy cream**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**

**Pinch cayenne**

**1½ tsp. finely chopped fresh delicate herbs, such as flat-leaf parsley, basil, chives, or summer savory**

In a small nonreactive skillet, melt 1 Tbs. of the butter. Add the garlic cloves and cook over medium-low heat, tossing occasionally, until the garlic is golden and very tender, 25 to 35 min.

Remove the pan from the heat and let cool to room temperature. In a food processor, beat the remaining unsalted butter with the garlic mixture until nearly smooth; set aside.

In a nonreactive saucepan, bring the wine and vinegar to a rapid boil. Simmer to reduce the mixture by half and then whisk in the cream. Simmer to reduce this mixture to about ½ cup. Off the heat, whisk in the garlic butter, 1 Tbs. at a time, to produce a creamy emulsion. Season to taste with salt, pepper, and a judicious pinch of cayenne. Keep the sauce warm but avoid overheating, which will cause it to separate. Just before serving, stir in the chopped herbs.

## Verjus Sauce for Oysters

This variation on the classic mignonette sauce uses a white *verjus* in place of red-wine vinegar. *Verjus*, the unsweetened, unfermented juice of unripened wine grapes, gives the sauce a more mellow flavor. You can find *verjus*, which comes in red or white just like wine, at specialty grocery stores, or you can order it (see Tasted & Tested, p. 14). *Yields about 1 cup.*

**1 tsp. grapeseed or canola oil**

**2 Tbs. whole black peppercorns, preferably Tellicherry**

**¼ tsp. salt, preferably sea salt**

**1 Tbs. finely minced fresh shallot**

**1 cup white *verjus***

**2 Tbs. closely snipped fresh chives or chive blossoms**



**A light, peppery *verjus* sauce brightens oysters. When handling them, be careful not to spill their own delicious juices.**

In a small, heavy-based skillet, heat the oil until very hot. Add the peppercorns, reduce the heat to medium low, and toast the peppercorns, swirling frequently, until aromatic, about 5 min. Pour the hot peppercorns onto a cutting board to cool. Using a blunt object (such as the bottom of a clean skillet or a meat mallet), crush the peppercorns coarsely but evenly. Put the crushed pepper into a nonreactive bowl and add the salt, shallot, and *verjus*. Stir well and then allow to steep for at least 30 min. at room temperature or in the refrigerator; the sauce will darken over time. Pour a little *verjus* sauce on the grilled oysters and garnish with the snipped chives.

*Sam Hayward is the chef and co-owner of Fore Street Restaurant in Portland, Maine. ♦*

## wine choices



## Sauvignon Blanc's herbal notes bring out grilled shellfish's best

Briny, mouthwatering shellfish hot off the grill clamors for a wine that rounds out its subtle flavors without overpowering it. Look for good acidity in the glass—it heightens the flavor of food just the way a squeeze of lemon does. Sauvignon Blanc (preferably Loire-style, non-blended, and non-oak-aged

to keep its flavors fresh and true) is an excellent candidate. The wine's "green" herbal flavors also help bring out the herbs in the garlic-butter sauce. For a classic example, seek out Vacheron et Fils or Sylvain Bailly, mid-priced Sancerres. Forrest, Hunter's, and Grove Mill from New Zealand are also well

worth the search. Closer to home, try the very reasonable Geyser Peak from Sonoma.

Or go with Chardonnay. Unless you want a butter-on-butter "embarrassment of riches" effect from big, pricey Chards (where, unfortunately, the shellfish would probably take a back seat), look for wines with little or no malo-

lactic fermentation (a second fermentation that softens Chardonnay's natural acids and brings in a buttery flavor). Isabel Estate from New Zealand or Trefethen of Napa would be excellent choices.

*Rosina Tinari Wilson writes about food and wine in the San Francisco Bay area.*





**"If I were a poet, I'd write an ode to eggplant,"** says Ayla Algar. "In Turkey, it's a monarch among vegetables."

BY AYLA ALGAR

**E**ggplant holds an esteemed place in many Mediterranean cuisines—caponata from Italy, ratatouille from Provence, moussaka from Greece, baba ghanouj from all over the Middle East—but I think that the Turkish kitchen has exploited its versatility to the fullest. Turks use eggplant in hot and cold dishes, cubed, sliced, layered, puréed, stuffed, wrapped around meat, and wrapped in pastry. For me, the smell of eggplant cooking in olive oil on a summer evening is one of the most evocative memories of my homeland. The absence of eggplant from any summer meal would be unthinkable.

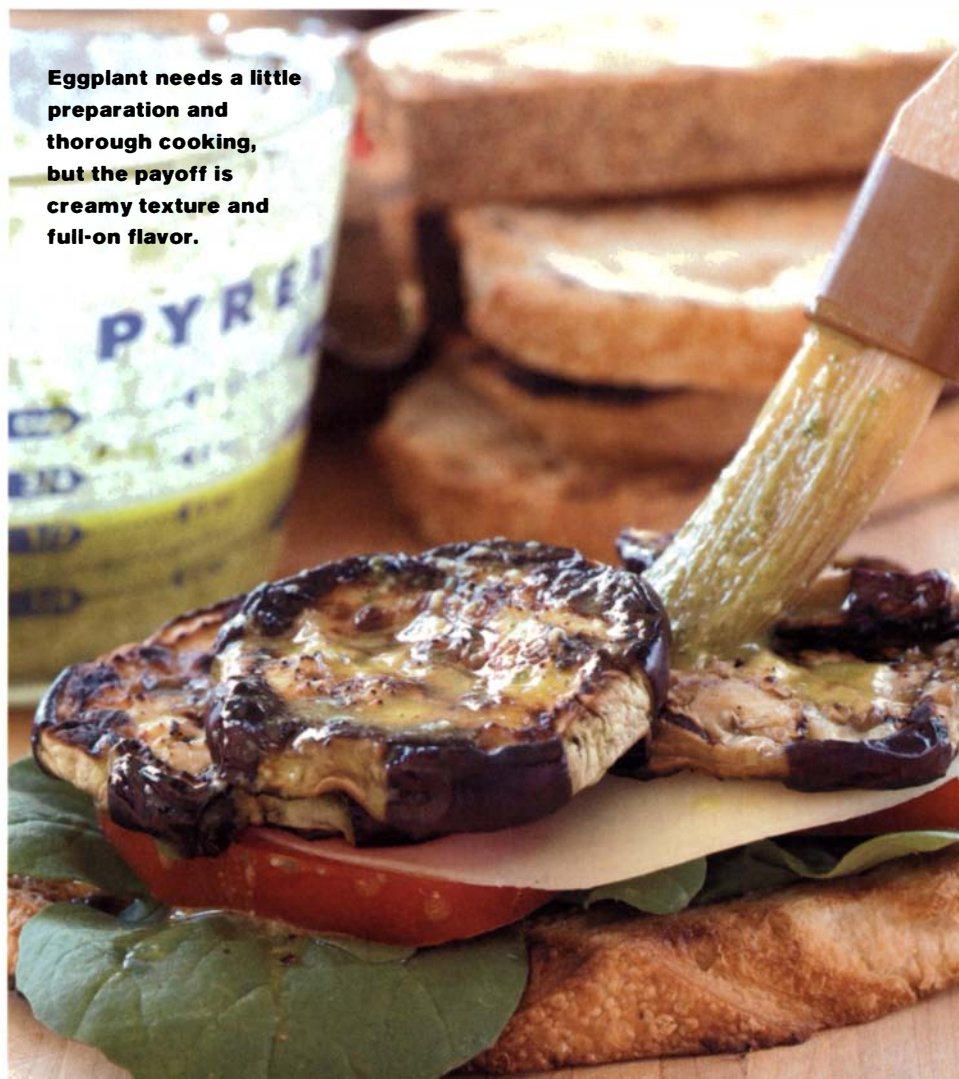
Having grown up in Turkey, and having cooked both there and in America, I've had many chances to cook with and savor eggplant in all its delicious changeability. But many American cooks I know hesitate when it comes to eggplant. What does salting the eggplant do? How to prevent it from soaking up all that oil and becoming greasy? How to know if you're properly cooking it when you're frying, grilling, or roasting? How to give it that special smoky taste that some dishes, such as baba ghanouj, require? Using a few simple techniques for selection, preparation, and cooking, you'll be able to fry, grill, or roast eggplant to succulent, creamy perfection.

#### **Choose eggplant that's smooth, shiny, and firm**

At the market, look for eggplant with smooth, shiny skin that's unwrinkled. The fruit should feel firm and spring back slightly when you touch it. Try to find an eggplant with a stem that looks moist, as if

# How to Cook Eggplant to Tender, Silky Perfection

Salting, peeling, and thorough cooking help coax this Mediterranean favorite to its creamy best



**Eggplant needs a little preparation and thorough cooking, but the payoff is creamy texture and full-on flavor.**

# Fried eggplant needn't be greasy



**1 Peel the eggplant in stripes** (unless you're using a tender-skinned variety) and then slice or cube it, depending on the recipe.



**2 Sprinkle it with salt** and let it drain in a colander for 1 hour.



**3 Rinse the eggplant thoroughly in cold water** and then firmly squeeze it out. Pat it dry with paper towels.



**4 Fry the eggplant slices until they're a rich brown**, 1 to 2 minutes per side. Drain on paper towels.

recently cut. It's best to use eggplant when it's very fresh, but it will keep for two or three days in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator.

Western or globe eggplant is the most common and versatile variety, and you can find it year-round, though in most parts of the country, the peak season is late summer. Though it needs a little preparation, the reward is a succulent, silky treat. Globe eggplant is the most versatile variety, too—its larger size enables you to get slices and chunks. It varies in size from  $\frac{3}{4}$  pound to  $1\frac{1}{4}$  pounds, with dark purple skin. A fresh globe eggplant has pale pulp with a few noticeable seeds, which darken and become bitter as the eggplant matures. Eggplant with parts of dark, hardened pulp with lots of dark seeds will be a disappointment—these parts must be removed; otherwise, the flavor and the texture of the finished dish will suffer.

The one type of dish for which globe eggplant isn't so good is stuffed eggplant dishes, such as Turkey's famed *imam bayildi* (pronounced AH-mahn by-yahleh), where you need smaller, individual eggplant for the look of the finished dish. Japanese eggplant is per-

fect for this; I can always be sure that the pulp will be tender and that the eggplant won't need peeling or salting. (See the box on p. 43 for more on varieties.)

## Peel and salt for a big improvement in texture

Because globe eggplant and other large varieties usually have tough skins, peeling it is a good idea, especially if you're serving it in chunks or slices, as with the Eggplant with Tomato & Garlic Sauce (opposite) and the Grilled Eggplant Sandwich (p. 42). Even then, I don't like to remove the skin entirely. Instead, I partially peel it in a striped fashion, the way Turkish cooks do (see the photo above left). For the Eggplant with Fragrant Spices (p. 43) and the Eggplant & Pepper Dip (p. 42), you'll be char-roasting the eggplant and separating the flesh from the peel, so keep the skin on during cooking to keep the eggplant intact.

Globe eggplant works deliciously in just about any eggplant dish, provided you salt it first. Salting, also known as purging, accomplishes two goals:

◆ **Preventing greasiness.** Globe eggplant, whose flesh is especially spongelike, tends to soak up more oil than other varieties. If you've ever brushed a raw,





unsalted slice with oil, you've probably noticed how readily the eggplant absorbed it. According to food scientist Harold McGee, salting draws out water and helps collapse the air pockets in globe eggplant's spongy flesh. This makes the eggplant much less able to soak up lots of oil during frying or grilling.

♦ **Reducing bitterness.** Salt pulls out juices that carry bitter flavors sometimes found in globe eggplant. (Agricultural scientists say that the bitterness, as well as the mouth-tingle that some people get from eggplant, is caused by alkaloids, bitter-tasting compounds concentrated in and around eggplant's seeds.) Salting may also serve to overpower any bitter flavors.

**To salt eggplant,** peel it and then slice, cube, or quarter it, depending on the recipe. Sprinkle the pieces generously with salt and let them sit in a colander for an hour (you'll usually see a lot of liquid beading on the surface). Rinse the eggplant in plenty of water to remove the salt, firmly squeeze a few pieces at a time in the palm of your hand to draw out almost all the moisture,

and then pat the eggplant dry with paper towels. Thorough drying is important; squeezing out excess moisture will give you a less greasy result.

### **Fry, grill, or roast—but whatever you do, cook eggplant thoroughly**

Eggplant is one vegetable for which slight undercooking will not work. It must be completely cooked through until it's meltingly soft, smooth, and creamy; only then will it be flavorful on its own, as well as receptive to the other flavors with which you'll blend it.

**Frying.** This cooking method seems to throw people the most because of how much grease eggplant can soak up. If you're using globe eggplant, salt it and squeeze it dry; other varieties don't need salting. Be sure the oil is very hot and put the slices in the pan in one layer (if you crowd the pan, the eggplant will steam instead of fry and won't cook evenly). Turn often and adjust the heat to avoid burning until the slices are a rich brown color. Drain on paper towels.

**Stir-frying.** Quick-cooking Japanese and Chinese eggplant are the best candidates for stir-frying. Cut the eggplant into ½-inch cubes. When the oil is very hot, toss the cubes into the pan with a little salt and stir-fry until the eggplant is a rich brown color.

**Grilling.** As for frying, salt and dry the eggplant. Brush the slices with oil and grill over a medium-hot fire until soft and cooked through.

**Char-roasting.** For the Eggplant with Fragrant Spices (p. 43) and the Eggplant & Pepper Dip (p. 42), the eggplant needs a smoky taste. To achieve this, pierce the eggplant with a skewer and cook it whole and unpeeled directly over a grill flame until the skin is blackened all over and the flesh is thoroughly soft, 15 to 20 minutes. Char-roasting can get messy, so if you're trying this over an indoor gas flame, line the burner trays with foil or try broiling the pierced eggplant instead. Peel off the blackened skin, drain the flesh in a colander, and squeeze out all the moisture.

**Oven-roasting.** As an alternative to char-roasting, pierce the eggplant in several places and roast it whole and unpeeled on a baking sheet at 350°F until it's quite soft and starting to collapse, almost an hour. Peel and drain it as you would for char-roasting.

## RECIPES

### **Eggplant with Tomato & Garlic Sauce**

You can't go wrong with this Turkish classic—even with canned tomatoes, it tastes great, served at room temperature or chilled. The flavor improves after a day or two, so make it ahead and keep it in the refrigerator. It's a delicious side dish or starter. *Serves four.*

**1 medium globe eggplant (about 1 ¼ lb.)**

**Salt**

**Olive oil for frying**

**1 ½ lb. sweet, ripe tomatoes, peeled and chopped (to yield 3 cups)**

**1 heaping tsp. minced garlic**

**2 ½ tsp. red-wine vinegar; more as needed**

*(Recipe continues)*

**Make Eggplant with Tomato & Garlic Sauce a day or two ahead.** It improves as it sits, and it's delicious warm, chilled, or at room temperature.





**Eggplant & Pepper Dip gets its great texture from a mortar and pestle.** Serve it with pita triangles, crusty peasant bread, or crackers.

**Fry the eggplant**—Partially peel the eggplant lengthwise, leaving ½-inch stripes of skin. Remove the stem. For large eggplant, quarter it lengthwise first. Slice the eggplant just thicker than ¼ inch. Sprinkle generously with salt and let stand in a colander for about 1 hour. Rinse the eggplant thoroughly and firmly squeeze each slice dry, patting with paper towels. In a large skillet over high heat, warm about ½ cup olive oil until very hot. Fry the eggplant slices a single layer at a time until rich brown on both sides, 1 to 2 min. per side; use more oil if needed. Drain on paper towels.

**Make the sauce**—Discard the oil from the pan and wipe it clean. Warm 1 Tbs. olive oil over medium heat. Add the tomatoes and sprinkle with a little salt; simmer, mashing the tomatoes with a fork, until they form a sauce and are no longer liquidy, about 15 min. Stir in the garlic and vinegar; remove from the heat.

Fan the eggplant slices on a platter and coat with the tomato sauce. Let cool and then refrigerate for at least a day. Serve cold or at room temperature.

### **Eggplant & Pepper Dip with Yogurt, Garlic & Walnuts**

I prefer the texture you get when you grind with a mortar and pestle, but a food processor works well, too. This dip tastes best when made ahead; it keeps well for two to three days in the refrigerator. *Yields 3 cups.*

**2 small globe eggplant (a little less than ¾ lb. each)**  
**Juice of 1 lemon**  
**1 small green bell pepper**  
**1 or 2 fresh green chiles, such as jalapeño, cored, seeded, and minced**  
**2 tsp. minced garlic**

**½ cup plain yogurt**  
**2 Tbs. finely chopped walnuts**  
**2 tsp. red-wine vinegar; more as needed**  
**2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**  
**Salt to taste**  
**1 Tbs. minced fresh flat-leaf parsley (optional)**

Light a grill fire. Grill the eggplant over the open fire or gas flame, turning them frequently, until the skins are black and parched and the flesh feels soft when pierced with a fork, about 10 min. When cool enough to handle, peel the charred skin and put the flesh in a colander. Sprinkle with the lemon juice and let stand for 10 min. Meanwhile, grill the bell pepper until it's soft and blackened on all sides, about 15 min. Seal the pepper in a paper bag for about 15 min. to cool, and peel when cool. Remove the seeds; peel and chop the flesh. Gently squeeze the liquid from the eggplant and transfer the pulp to a mortar or a food processor, along with the bell pepper and chiles. Grind or pulse to a coarse purée. Stir in the garlic, yogurt, walnuts, vinegar, and olive oil; taste and add salt and more vinegar if you like. Mound in a serving bowl and let stand at room temperature for several hours. Garnish with minced parsley, if you like, and serve at room temperature with crusty bread, pita triangles, or crackers.



**Char-roasting gives eggplant deep, smoky flavor.** The charred skin peels off easily.

### **Grilled Eggplant Sandwich**

The basil vinaigrette can be made ahead. *Serves four.*

#### **FOR THE VINAIGRETTE:**

**¾ cup loosely packed fresh basil leaves**  
**½ tsp. fresh thyme leaves**  
**1½ tsp. minced garlic**  
**1 Tbs. pine nuts**  
**2 Tbs. red-wine vinegar**  
**Scant ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil**  
**Salt to taste**

#### **FOR THE SANDWICH:**

**1 large globe eggplant (about 2 lb.)**  
**Salt**  
**Olive oil**  
**8 slices country bread**  
**8 slices ripe tomatoes**  
**1 bunch arugula, rinsed and dried, stems trimmed**  
**4 thin slices provolone cheese**

**To make the vinaigrette**—In a food processor, combine the basil, thyme, garlic, pine nuts, and vinegar. Process until finely chopped, scraping down the sides as needed. With the machine running, slowly add the olive oil in a thin stream. Adjust seasonings if needed.





**Eggplant with Fragrant Spices is an exotic dish that's easy, too.** Coriander, cumin, turmeric, and cayenne add both flavor and aroma.

**To prepare the eggplant**—Partially peel the eggplant lengthwise, leaving ½-inch stripes of skin. Slice the eggplant ½ inch thick, sprinkle the slices generously with salt, and let stand in a colander for about 1 hour. Rinse thoroughly, gently squeeze each slice dry, and pat with paper towels. Light a grill fire. Brush the slices generously with olive oil. Over a part of the grill that's medium hot, grill the slices until soft and cooked through, about 5 min. per side.

Grill the bread slices until lightly toasted. Brush the eggplant, tomatoes, and the slices of bread with the vinaigrette. Assemble each sandwich with arugula leaves, eggplant, tomatoes, and cheese. Slice each sandwich and serve.

### **Eggplant with Fragrant Spices & Herbs (Bhartha)**

This is a delicious way that Indian and Pakistani cooks prepare roasted or grilled eggplant, and it tastes best made a day or two ahead. It's good as a light lunch, served hot or cold with rice pilaf and a bowl of yogurt, or as a side dish with pita triangles. You can even use it in sandwiches. *Yields 5 cups; serves six as a side dish.*

**2 medium globe eggplant (about 1¼ lb. each)**  
**2 tsp. ground coriander**  
**2 tsp. ground cumin**  
**1 tsp. turmeric**  
**½ tsp. cayenne, or to taste**  
**Salt to taste**  
**½ cup vegetable oil**  
**2 large onions, chopped (to yield 2 cups)**  
**2 tsp. minced garlic**  
**1-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and minced**  
**1 small fresh green chile, such as jalapeño, cored, seeded, and minced**  
**2 medium tomatoes, chopped**  
**⅓ cup chopped fresh cilantro**  
**Fresh lemon juice**  
**Fresh cilantro leaves for garnish**

Light a grill fire. Grill the eggplant over the open fire or gas flame, turning them frequently, until the skins are black and parched and the flesh feels soft when pierced with a fork, about 18 min. (Alternatively, prick the eggplant in several places and roast on a foil-lined baking sheet in a 350°F oven until soft, turning two or three times, about 1 hour.) When the eggplant are cool enough to handle, peel the charred skin and put them in a colander to drain. Squeeze the eggplant gently to get rid of the extra moisture and chop the pulp. Set aside. In a small bowl, combine the coriander, cumin, turmeric, cayenne, and a little salt; set aside.

Heat the oil in a skillet and fry the onion over medium-high heat until golden brown, about 30 min. Add the garlic, ginger, and fresh chile and cook, stirring frequently, until fragrant. Add the spice mixture and cook, stirring a few seconds until fragrant. Add the tomatoes and cook over medium heat until the tomatoes are soft, about 5 min. Stir in the eggplant pulp and the chopped cilantro. Cook, stirring often, until all the liquid in the pan evaporates and the oil begins to separate and forms a glaze over the mixture, about 20 min. Taste and add salt if needed. Serve in a bowl sprinkled with more cilantro leaves.

*Ayla Algar, the author of Classical Turkish Cooking (HarperCollins), is the Mellon Lecturer in Turkish at the University of California, Berkeley. ♦*

## **Try other varieties from around the world**

Eggplant varieties other than globe are worth seeking out. All have tender flesh and seeds and none need peeling (unless you're roasting and puréeing them for a dip). These varieties don't absorb as much oil as globe eggplant, nor are they bitter.

**Italian eggplant** is smaller than the globe variety. It's lobed, with dark purple skin and green leaves.

**Chinese eggplant** is elongated, slender, and has light purple skin. It's quick-cooking, which makes it a good candidate for stir-frying.

**Japanese eggplant** is also elongated, slender, and quick-cooking. This variety has dark purple skin. Its brownish leaves distinguish it from the Italian eggplant.

**White eggplant** is oval, with a beautiful eggshell-white hue; one look will tell you how eggplant earned its name. The flesh is especially creamy and is less bitter than darker-hued eggplant.

**Southeast Asian eggplant** is the size of a cherry tomato, green-striped or purple. It's quite bitter and best for pickling.






# Baking Brownies Just Right:




**Blondies are full of rich butterscotch flavor,** thanks to dark brown sugar and sweet butter that get melted together before the other ingredients go in.



**Cakey brownies use cake-baking technique.** Their rich yet fluffy texture comes from creaming the butter and sugar together before adding the chocolate.



**Chewy brownies owe their texture to a whole cup of flour.** The flour's protein gives these brownies their "bite."



**Fudgy brownies have almost twice as much chocolate as the others.** These are a cross between chocolate fudge and a rich chocolate torte.



# Cakey, Chewy, or Fudgy

Change the proportions of ingredients  
to bake the style you like best

BY CINDY MITCHELL

**B**rownies come in all guises—with nuts, without, butterscotch, swirled with cream cheese, shot through with mint or fruit filling, sprinkled with chips, spiked with espresso or booze, or just plain chocolate in a million variations. But the most important aspect of a brownie, for anyone who loves brownies, is texture. Initially, I thought there were just two camps, cakey versus fudgy, and I was firmly planted in the cakey camp. But after testing, tasting, and canvassing friends and colleagues about what they prize most in a brownie, I began to see that there's a third style to consider: chewy, which is definitely different from its cakey and fudgy siblings.

I'll say right off that I could never claim to write the Bible on brownies—there are so many recipes, and everyone has a favorite. But as I'll show you, there are definitely guidelines to follow so that you can make the style of brownie that suits your taste, whether it's cakey, fudgy, or chewy. I've also thrown in a butterscotch blondie, as well as chocolate brownie cookies, a huge favorite at my bakery, Grace Baking, and the happy result of a measuring mistake.

## Similar ingredients, different proportions

All of these brownie recipes have enough chocolate flavor to satisfy a chocolate yearning, and they all have similar ingredients. But because of the varying amounts of chocolate, butter, sugar, and flour, the texture of each brownie is quite different. To keep things simple, I've left nuts out of the three chocolate variations, but feel free to add them,  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup or so. I especially love chopped toasted walnuts in the cakey version.

**A fudgy brownie is dense, with a moist, intensely chocolatey interior.** I think of it as somewhere between a rich truffle torte and a piece of fudge. You'll see that I've included both bittersweet and unsweetened chocolate: I love the deep, intense chocolate flavor they pack when used together. I've



added an egg yolk to contribute fudgy richness without greasiness. Because the batter is quite dense, I suggest beating it vigorously with a wooden spoon to ensure a smooth, even texture.

**A chewy brownie is moist, but not quite as gooey as a fudgy one.** The chewiness seems to come from a couple of different factors: more all-purpose flour, whose proteins provide “bite” (I find that cake flour, which is lower in protein, results in a light, crumbly texture that’s too delicate for brownies); and whole eggs, whose whites give structure and “set.”

**A cakey brownie has a moist crumb and a slightly fluffy interior.** The batter contains less

**Start your brownies with melted chocolate.** Whether you melt it with butter or not, use the gentle heat of a double boiler—there's no remedy for scorched chocolate.

butter than the other recipes, and I include milk and a little corn syrup for moistness (the milk and corn syrup are also great ways to extend a brownie's shelf life). I don't use much flour (even less than for most cakes), and while brownies don't usually use chemical leavens, I add some baking powder to keep this cakey brownie light.

When I mix cakey brownies, I use a bit of cake-baking technique, too: creaming the butter and sugar first (rather than melting the butter) and then whisking the batter to aerate the mixture and get a light crumb. I think this brownie improves on sitting at least one and even two days after you bake it.

### **Killer brownies don't need expensive chocolate**

With high-quality chocolate—both domestic and imported—more readily available these days, I've noticed that many bakers have opted to get fancy with brownies. I'm a stickler for good ingredients, but I also believe that brownies are best when you keep them simple. While I encourage you to experiment with different chocolates, I got delicious results in all these recipes with supermarket-handly unsweetened and bittersweet chocolate.

### **Test for doneness before the recipe tells you to**

In addition to ingredient proportions, baking time greatly affects the consistency of a brownie, so it's important to be attentive. Fudgy brownies baked three minutes too short can be unpleasantly gooey; chewy brownies baked three minutes too long be-



**Cakey brownies need cake-baking technique.**  
Cindy Mitchell uses a whisk to aerate the batter.

come tough and dry. I encourage you to invest in an oven thermometer (about \$6), a valuable help in ensuring consistent results.

**Brownies will cook more quickly in metal pans than in glass**, which is what accounts for the wide time windows in the recipes. If you're using metal, cooking times will be on the short side; with Pyrex, they'll be longer. For all these recipes, and regardless of the pan you're using, start testing for doneness after 20 minutes of baking. First, press your fingers gently into the center of the pan. If the brownie feels like it's just setting, insert a toothpick near the center. The pick will probably be wet, but this early testing is good for comparison's sake. Continue baking for 5 to 8 minutes and then insert the toothpick again near the center. Brownies are done when the toothpick comes out with a few moist crumbs still clinging. It's okay for the pick to look moist, but if you see wet batter, keep baking.

**For uniform squares, flip the cooled, whole brownie out of the pan.** You'll have a much easier time cutting neat squares, with the option of cutting off the edges if you want to. Lining the pan bottoms with parchment makes it much easier to get the brownie out of the pan. If you don't have any on hand, waxed paper works, too.

One last word: although it's awfully tempting to cut into a pan of just-baked brownies, hold off. The flavor and texture of each type of brownie will be at its best—and definitely worth waiting for—when completely cool.

## **Are they done yet?**

Start testing for doneness before the recipe says to. Press gently in the center of the pan—the brownie should feel like it has just set. Then insert a toothpick to be sure. “When in doubt,” says Cindy Mitchell, “lean toward underdone rather than overdone.”



**Brownies are underdone** when smudges of wet batter cling to the toothpick.



**Brownies are just right** when traces of moistness and fudgy crumbs cling to the toothpick.



**Brownies are overdone** when the toothpick comes out perfectly clean.





**"Cakey brownies are good by themselves, or you can doll them up,"** says Cindy Mitchell. Try stenciling with confectioners' sugar.

## RECIPES

### Cakey Brownies

These are rich and luscious, with a cakey lightness. *Yields sixteen 2-inch squares.*

**4 oz. unsweetened chocolate**  
**2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature; more for the pan**  
 **$\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar**  
**1 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. light corn syrup**  
**2 large eggs, at room temperature**  
**2 tsp. vanilla extract**  
 **$\frac{1}{4}$  cup milk, lukewarm**  
**2 $\frac{1}{4}$  oz. ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup) all-purpose flour**  
 **$\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. baking powder**  
**Pinch salt**

Position an oven rack on the middle rung. Heat the oven to 350°F. In a double boiler over simmering water, melt the chocolate. Remove the pan from the heat; cool slightly. Butter an 8-inch square pan, line the pan bottom with parchment (or waxed paper), and then butter the parchment. In a medium bowl, cream the butter with a fork. Beat in the sugar and corn syrup; be sure there are no lumps in the mixture. Add the eggs, one at a time, whisking thoroughly. Add the vanilla and milk. Whisk until incorporated, about 30 seconds. The batter may appear broken; this is okay. Whisk in the melted chocolate, beating until the batter is smooth and has thickened slightly, 30 to 60 seconds. Stir together the flour, baking powder, and salt so they're well blended; stir the dry ingredients into the chocolate mixture until incorporated. Scrape into the prepared pan and bake until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean with a few moist crumbs clinging to it, 20 to 30 min. Set the pan on a rack until cool enough to handle. Run a paring knife around the inside edge of the pan and then invert the pan onto a flat surface and peel off the parchment. Flip the baked brownie back onto the rack to cool completely. Cut into squares with a sharp knife.



### Chewy Brownies

Added flour helps to give these brownies their chewiness. It's important not to overbake these or they'll dry out. *Yields sixteen 2-inch squares.*

**4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter; more for the pan**  
**4 oz. unsweetened chocolate**  
**1 $\frac{1}{2}$  cups sugar**  
**Scant  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. salt**  
**2 tsp. vanilla extract**  
**2 large eggs, at room temperature**  
**4 $\frac{1}{2}$  oz. (1 cup) flour**  
**2 Tbs. natural cocoa (not Dutch-processed)**

Position an oven rack on the middle rung. Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter an 8-inch square pan, line the pan bottom with parchment (or waxed paper), and then butter the parchment. In a double boiler over simmering water, melt the butter and chocolate. Remove the pan from the heat; cool slightly. Stir in the sugar, salt, and vanilla. Mix in the eggs, one at a time, stirring each time until blended. Add the flour and cocoa; beat until incorporated and the mixture is smooth, 30 to 60 seconds. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and bake until the top is uniformly colored with no indentation and a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out almost clean, with a few moist crumbs clinging to it, 35 to 45 min. Set the pan on a rack until cool enough to handle. Run a paring knife around the inside edge of the pan and then invert the pan onto a flat surface and peel off the parchment. Flip the baked brownie back onto the rack to cool completely. Cut into squares with a sharp knife.

**Chewy brownies get an added chocolate kick from cocoa,** which packs lots of chocolate flavor without adding lots more fat.

### Notes:

- ◆ All recipes can be doubled easily: use a 13x9-inch pan and increase the baking time slightly.
- ◆ The recipes give a range of baking times—use the shorter time for metal pans, the longer for Pyrex pans.

*(More recipes follow)*





**Even with fudgy brownies, you can get neat, uniform squares.** Turn them out of the pan and, when they're completely cool, cut them with a sharp knife. Wipe the knife after each pass.

### Fudgy Brownies

Using both bittersweet and unsweetened chocolate gives these brownies deep, sophisticated chocolate flavor. The consistency is fudgy but not gooey or underdone. *Yields sixteen 2-inch squares.*

**5 oz. (10 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature**  
**2 oz. unsweetened chocolate**  
**5 oz. bittersweet chocolate**  
**1 cup sugar**  
**2 tsp. vanilla extract**  
**Pinch salt**  
**2 large eggs, at room temperature**  
**1 large egg yolk, at room temperature**  
**3 oz. (¾ cup) all-purpose flour**

Position an oven rack on the middle rung. Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter an 8-inch square pan, line the pan bottom with parchment (or waxed paper), and then butter the parchment. In a double boiler over simmering water, melt the butter and both chocolates. Remove the pan from the heat; cool slightly. Whisk in the sugar and then the vanilla and salt. The mixture will be somewhat grainy; this is okay. Whisk in the eggs and egg yolk, one at a time, stirring each time until blended. Add the flour, beating until thickened and smooth, 30 to 60 seconds. Pour into the prepared pan and bake until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out with moist crumbs (not wet batter) clinging to it, 35 to 45 min. Set the pan on a rack until cool enough to handle. Run a paring knife around the inside edge of the pan and then invert the pan onto a flat surface and peel off the parchment. Flip the baked brownie back onto the rack to cool completely. Cut into squares with a sharp knife.

### Blondies

Dark brown sugar will give you an especially flavorful blondie. *Yields sixteen 2-inch squares.*

**4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter; more for the pan**  
**1½ cups firmly packed dark brown sugar**  
**1 large egg, at room temperature**  
**1 large egg yolk, at room temperature**  
**1½ tsp. vanilla extract**  
**5 oz. (1 cup plus 2 Tbs.) all-purpose flour**  
**Scant ¼ tsp. salt**  
**2 oz. (¾ cup) coarsely chopped toasted pecans**

Position an oven rack on the middle rung. Heat the oven to 350°F. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, heat the butter and brown sugar, stirring frequently, until the sugar has dissolved. Cook, stirring, about 1 min. longer—the mixture will bubble but should not boil. Set the pan aside to cool for about 10 min. Meanwhile, butter an 8-inch square pan, line the pan bottom with parchment (or waxed paper), and then butter the parchment. Stir the egg, egg yolk, and vanilla into the cooled sugar mixture. Add the flour, salt, and nuts, stirring just until blended. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Bake until the center is springy when touched (the top may still look doughy) and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean (it's fine if there are a few moist crumbs clinging to it), 25 to 35 min. Set the pan on a rack until it's cool enough to handle. Run a paring knife around the inside edge of the pan and then invert the pan onto a flat surface and peel off the parchment. Flip the baked blondie back onto the rack to cool completely. Cut into squares with a sharp knife.



**Blondies have a chewy texture, with rich butter-scotch flavor standing in for chocolate.**





**Chocolate Brownie Cookies are crackly outside, gooey inside.** Each one is a bite's worth of brownie, in cookie form.

### Chocolate Brownie Cookies

These cookies are really popular at our bakery, Grace Baking. A pastry bag is faster than a spoon for piping the cookie batter; use a #4 tip. It's okay to pipe the cookies close together; they won't spread much during baking. *Yields about 4½ dozen cookies.*

**2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter; more for the pan**  
**12 oz. bittersweet chocolate, chopped**  
**3 large eggs, at room temperature**  
**¾ cup sugar**  
**2 tsp. vanilla extract**  
**1½ oz. (⅓ cup) all-purpose flour**  
**¼ tsp. baking powder**  
**¼ tsp. salt**  
**4 oz. (1 cup) chopped toasted pecans**

Position an oven rack on the center rung. Heat the oven to 350°F and line two baking sheets with parchment (or grease and flour the pan). In a double boiler over simmering water, melt the butter and chocolate. Stir to combine; let cool. In an electric mixer with the whisk attachment, beat the eggs and sugar on medium high to a ribbon consistency, 3 to 4 min. Take the bowl off the mixer. Add the cooled chocolate mixture and the vanilla; stir to combine. Sift the flour, baking powder, and salt together. Stir the flour mixture and the nuts into the batter; let the batter rest for 5 min. Spoon the batter into a pastry bag fitted with a #4 tip (or into a heavy-duty zip-top bag with one bottom corner snipped to create a ⅜-inch diagonal opening). For each cookie, pipe 1 Tbs. batter onto the lined baking sheet. While you pipe the second tray, bake the first until the cookies are puffed and cracked and the tops barely spring back when pressed, 8 to 10 min. The cracks should be moist but not wet. Cool the cookies on a wire rack.

**Variation**—Substitute 1½ tsp. mint extract for the vanilla and the nuts.

*Cindy Mitchell and her husband, Glenn, own Grace Baking in the San Francisco Bay area. ♦*

For the neatest squares,  
flip the whole brownie  
out of the pan



Run a sharp paring knife around the edge of the pan. This helps to ease the whole baked brownie out of the pan.



Flip out the whole brownie when the pan is cool enough to handle and then peel off the parchment.

Now invert the whole brownie on a rack to cool completely before cutting.





# In Search of a High-Performance Pepper Mill

What makes an ideal pepper grinder?

Comfort, durability, easy filling, and a wide range of grinds

BY SARAH JAY



I learned a long time ago the importance of using freshly ground pepper to accent and sharpen flavors in my cooking. But until recently, I hadn't given much thought to the tool I was using to accomplish this everyday task. And I was paying the price for my indifference—one of my pepper mills had a sharp ridge that dug into my palm with each twist, and the other was so tiny that it held barely enough peppercorns to season one meal. An informal survey of my friends who like to cook suggested that I wasn't the only one not holding my pepper mills to very high standards. If it grinds, my friends said, they're satisfied. But why settle for mediocrity? If you know what to look for, you can find a superior pepper mill, one that you'll love using and that you won't dread refilling.

I reviewed fourteen mills for this article. To choose them, I asked professional chefs for their picks and wandered through kitchen shops looking for those mills that seemed to put function ahead of form (my pepper grinders live in the kitchen; I might give a little more slack to a mill that's destined for the dining room table). After a long afternoon in the *Fine Cooking* test kitchen, where I did a lot of grinding, measuring, refilling, cranking, squeezing (and sneezing), I discovered two promising mills, the Magnum and the Peppermate, that offer everything I want in a pepper grinder:

- ◆ a sensible, comfortable design.
- ◆ a strong, sturdy construction so the mill lasts a long time.
- ◆ a way to adjust the grind from fine to coarse, and an efficient grinding mechanism that produces a lot of ground pepper with little effort.
- ◆ a large capacity and a convenient refilling system so replenishing peppercorns is an occasional, trouble-free event.

While a lot of pepper mills meet two or three of my requirements, it's an unusual pepper grinder that





An efficient mill saves time. Every twist of the Magnum produces a shower of ground pepper.



If you loathe refilling, search for a mill with one-step loading (as in the aluminum Perfix in front) and a large capacity.

captures all four traits. And the only way to tell if one does is to see—and feel—it in action. So before you buy, take a test drive. Bring along a small supply of the peppercorns you often use, and, if the shop permits, fill it up and start to grind.

### **If it feels good in your hand, you'll want to use it**

Shop for a pepper mill as you should for shoes: comfort first. A pepper grinder that feels good in your hand is a pleasure to use, and you'll be more generous with your seasoning as a result. Is the pepper mill easy to grip, and does it fit the size of your hand? The classic hourglass or pawn-shaped design makes sense to me. With its tapered middle, your hand can wrap around it perfectly.

**Decide on your preferred method of grinding: knob, crank, wing nut, or squeeze handle.** Many pepper mills have a top section that must be turned to grind the pepper, as you would turn a doorknob. In these mills, you'll want the "doorknob" part to be comfortable. I'm partial to big, rounded tops that conform to my palm so I can get a secure grip and a good rotation with each twist. You might prefer a pepper mill with a crank handle. (Some people with arthritic hands say that handle-type mills are the *only* ones for them.) I like the idea of handles because they let you grind continuously without changing your hand position.

Some mills have a wing nut or a turnkey that turns the grinder; others have a handle or a bar that

you squeeze, much as you squeeze handlebar brakes on a bicycle. I like the wing nut when it's on the side of the mill, as it is with the Peppermate, but this style might not be for everyone. Squeeze handles feel awkward to me, and they rarely live up to their manufacturers' claims of one-handed use.

In any style of mill, beware of annoying angles or designs that would cause discomfort or even pain after more than a few grinds. Also, consider heft. If the grinder is so weighty that it could double as a doorstop, it may prove too cumbersome for frequent use in the kitchen.

### **For a mill that lasts, insist on a steel grinding mechanism**

Quite a few manufacturers offer lifetime warranties on their pepper mills, which is either a sign of confidence in their products or, as one manufacturer told me, an indication of the paucity of customers who will go through the bother of returning a faulty mill. While it's impossible to predict which mills will stand the test of time, some clues suggest better craftsmanship.

Mills with a wooden or metal housing tend to be more durable than plastic. A plastic pepper grinder that crashes to the floor (hey, it happens) is likely to break, while a wooden or metal mill would survive a bad fall (though a tile floor might not).

**A steel mechanism ensures a long life of cracking and grinding.** A pepper mill is a fairly simple apparatus. The grinding mechanism usually consists of a shaft attached to a grooved grinding head. The grooved head fits within a larger grooved nut. As the shaft turns, the pepper is first cracked and then ground between the two grooved pieces. If your mill no longer grinds well, or if it no longer grinds at all,

it may be because the two grooved grinding elements have eroded.

Bill Penzey, who owns Penzeys, a mail-order spice company in Muskego, Wisconsin, recommends picking a mill with a grinding mechanism that can survive years of rubbing against the hardened bumpy shell of a dried pepper berry. "The really nice mills have not just a metal grinding mechanism," he says, "but machine-cut metal rather than cast metal."

When it comes to grinding mechanisms, stainless steel and carbon steel are examples of machine-cut metals; they're harder, they have sharper edges, and they won't wear down as quickly as a softer cast metal like zinc alloy. Unfortunately, it isn't always obvious which is which (some pepper grinders will say), but the lower quality zinc-alloy mechanisms may have visible seams running down their sides. A magnet will be attracted to a carbon-steel mechanism, but not to zinc alloy. Another clue is price. Steel grinding mechanisms cost more, usually at least \$20 (under \$15 strongly suggests a cast metal).

**I would also consider a mill with a ceramic grinding mechanism.** "Ceramic will keep its sharpness forever—it never dulls or rusts," says Philippe Trudeau, who is a national sales manager for Trudeau, a 110-year-old Canadian company that makes pepper mills with both steel and ceramic grinding mechanisms. Ceramic mechanisms are more versatile, too. Mr. Trudeau says they can be used to grind salt, dried herbs, and spices without absorbing or transferring flavors.

As for specific brands, professional chefs often mention Peugeot as the one that lasts, along with another French mill, the aluminum-housed Perfix. (They both have steel mechanisms.) Bill Penzey says the German-made Zassenhaus is also quite solid, citing testimonials from people who are using Zassenhaus mills handed down from a grandparent.



**Practical from top to bottom.** Snap off the Peppermate's lid to pour in peppercorns or to adjust the grind. Pop off the transparent base (right) to measure out some ground pepper.



### **An adjustable grind encourages variation in seasoning**

A high-quality pepper mill should offer some way to adjust the coarseness of the grind, an essential feature even if you only do it once every few months.

**It helps if the method of adjusting the grind functions independently from how you fill the mill.** Some mills have an adjustment screw or dial on the bottom, which is convenient, but the standard method seems to be a screw on top, the same screw that removes the top for refilling. That means that every time you refill the pepper mill, you have to fiddle with the grind.

**A wide range of grinds means you can use the mill for everything from salad dressings to steak *au poivre*.** Many people set their mills to a favorite grind, whether fine or coarse, and then proceed to forget that adjustability is even an option. That's fine, but sometimes a recipe calls for a particular grind. Coarsely cracked pepper is in order for rubbing on a steak or a roast, for example. Baked goods and delicate soups benefit from a very fine grind. It's easy to find pepper mills that can grind on one extreme or the other, but few mills excel on both ends of the spectrum. This is where the Magnum, which is made by Tom David Inc. in Nantucket, stands out; it truly grinds from very fine to very coarse. (Oddly, another mill from the same company, called the Peppergun, doesn't perform nearly as well.)

The best way to check the range of grind is to try out the mill, but if that's not possible, turn it upside down and examine the grinding mechanism as you change the grind. The gap between the grooved head and nut widens for coarser grinds. Also, check for a constant and consistent grind; some pepper mills slip to a different setting after just a few turns.

**An efficient mill produces a lot of ground pepper with little effort.** To test efficiency, I counted how many turns, twists, or squeezes it took to get one-half teaspoon of pepper. Some mills needed only five turns, others required more than one hundred. If a spice rub calls for half a teaspoon of finely ground pepper—not an unusually large amount—my muscle (and patience) will give out well before the hundredth squeeze.

### **A wide mouth makes refilling almost enjoyable**

"I like the Peugeot, and I like the fact that it lasts and lasts and lasts, but it drives me crazy that you have to put the berries in almost one at a time," says Ann Wilder, president and owner of Vanns Spices, a spice wholesaler in Baltimore. "I suppose you could get out a funnel and put them in that way, but I just can't be bothered with that."

Neither can I, especially when the feed tube in most kitchen funnels is too narrow to accommodate



a steady flow of peppercorns. So my fourth and final criteria is that the pepper mill can hold a lot of peppercorns—several tablespoons at least—so I don't have to replenish them very often. And it should have a wide refill mouth, so it's easy to reload when that last peppercorn gets ground.

Of the mills I tested, there was one hands-down winner in this category: the Peppermate. It has a snap-off lid that opens to a 2½x1½-inch void, plenty of room to refill directly from a jar or bag. I also like mills with a pull-out chute or a sliding door for reloading, such as those on the Perfex and the Magnum. These provide fast, convenient access, but because their holes are not that much larger than most screw-off top-loading mills, a few peppercorns inevitably miss the target.

My two favorite mills have one more endearing feature: a stand, an admittedly minor touch but useful nevertheless. The Magnum's stand is nothing more than a plastic disk, but it saves me from having to constantly wipe pepper dust off the shelf. The Peppermate's stand is actually a transparent plastic tub for catching the pepper as it's ground. When a recipe calls for a precise amount of pepper, this basin makes it neat and simple to measure. The Peppermate rests flat on the counter even when the basin is off, but I'd keep the basin attached because, once again, it keeps things clean. Although both of these mills are housed in plastic, they have steel mechanisms and feel solid enough to justify their price, usually around \$40.

Sarah Jay is an associate editor for Fine Cooking. ♦



Among its many conveniences, the Magnum offers an accessible sliding window for refills and a stand to contain pepper dust.



Most good-quality mills feature an adjustable grind, but the best ones will take you from powder fine to coarsely cracked.

## A few outstanding pepper mills

Brand/Price	Comfort/Mechanism	Efficiency*	Range	Capacity	Refilling	Notes
<b>Magnum</b> \$35	very comfortable; doorknob style	25 twists for finest; 5 for coarsest	very fine to almost cracked	½ cup	sliding window on side; very easy	1
<b>Peppermate</b> \$45	very comfortable; wing-nut style	25 turns for finest; 14 for coarsest	powder fine to medium coarse	½ cup	largest opening; very easy	2
<b>Banton</b> \$20 (10")	very comfortable; doorknob style	20 twists for finest; 12 for coarsest	very fine to medium coarse	⅓ cup	unscrew top	3
<b>Perfex</b> \$45	somewhat comfortable; crank handle	15 turns for finest 11 for coarsest	medium fine to medium coarse	3 Tbs.	pull-out chute; very easy	
<b>Peugeot</b> \$40 (10½")	very comfortable; doorknob style	20 twists for finest; 10 for coarsest;	very fine to very coarse	⅓ cup	unscrew top	3
<b>Zassenhaus</b> \$35 (large)	comfortable; crank handle	20 turns for finest; 10 for coarsest	very fine to medium coarse	3 Tbs.	unscrew handle	3

### Notes

\* To produce ½ teaspoon ground pepper

1. Has plastic stand

2. Transparent catch tray lets you see how much pepper you're grinding

3. Refills through the grinding mechanism, so the setting is lost

See Sources, p. 76, for where to buy these pepper mills.

# Of Bees and Honey

Meet two  
beekeepers who  
craft pure, organic  
honey by hand

BY AMY ALBERT

**I**t's a sizzling August day in Sonoma, California. High in the hills, I can see clear to the Golden Gate Bridge from Lynn and Jon Weinberger's back yard, which is also home to their tiny apiary, Bee Happy. "You picked a perfect day," Lynn says as she comes down the hill to greet me.

At noontime, it's 100 degrees with no breeze. The weather is perfect—for honey gathering, that is. Noon is high time for Lynn and Jon's honey bees to be away from the hives, out foraging for pollen, nectar, and, in this swelter, water. There are a few bees buzzing around us, but they're busy and a lot less apt to get irked by what we're about to do: open their hives and take their honey.

We're clad in white, the color least likely to attract (bees are drawn to black and, as you'd guess, bright colors). Scent attracts, too; Lynn warned me to wear no perfume, to stay calm if any bees approached—and if they did, definitely not to swat. "If you tense up or get aggressive, the bees will get angry—and that's when they'll sting. They're drawn to pheromones," she explains, referring to the scent that animals, including humans, emit when aroused or threatened (the queen bee's



**Honey is a pure and natural reflection of its surroundings. Each season's yield has a slightly different color and flavor, depending on how the flowers in the immediate area have grown in any given year.**

pheromones are what keep drones and workers close to the hive to impregnate, feed, and guard her).

As Lynn describes how the product we know as honey happens, it occurs to me that it's the bees who are really the artisans. While beekeeping takes skill and artistry, once the honey is extracted from the combs, it needn't be transformed or worked in any way. The bees forage for nectar, which they digest, adding an enzyme that converts the sucrose in nectar to glucose and fructose. They in turn ferry the nectar to other bees, who deposit it in the honeycomb cells. The bees flutter their wings to ventilate the hive, which

evaporates water from the nectar, concentrating the sugars. Nectar becomes honey when its water level falls to 18 percent and the sugar concentration rises to about 80 percent. It's thought that the bees use humidity and taste sensors to determine when the transformation is complete. At this point, the bees cap the cells with a thin layer of beeswax to protect the honey.

Lynn and Jon tighten the strings on their netted beekeeper's bonnets. We head out into the searing heat to lift heavy, honey-drenched wooden frames from their beehives, where honey bees have been laboring for the last couple of months.

Photos except where noted: Daniel Proctor





1

A small bit of smoke is puffed into the hives to distract the bees. Most of the bees are out foraging, but for those that remain in the hive, smoke is a distraction: it signals a fire nearby. Smoke prompts the bees to prepare for possible evacuation, which they do by gobbling up as much honey as possible; at this point they're too busy to pay attention to intruders. Smoking is important, but it's crucial to go easy to avoid tainting the honey.



2

Hive boxes, or "supers," house stacks of frames. It's inside these frames that bee colonies have built a network of hexagonal beeswax cells that compose the honeycomb. The cells are storage cubbies for the pollen and

nectar on which the bees feed—and that the Weinbergers will collect. Throughout the honeymaking season in Sonoma, from April until October, Lynn and Jon keep close tabs on the hives to make sure that they don't get overcrowded, adding more boxes as frames fill up with honey. This is essential: bees make honey to feed their queen and themselves, and if there's no more room for nectar, pollen, and bees, the colony, squeezed for space, will swarm in search of a new home. "I've had swarms almost every season that I've been a beekeeper, says Lynn. "But bees are so healthy for the environment, I don't consider it a tragedy to lose some to a swarm from time to time."

*(Continued)*





3

Lynn and Jon carefully lift the frames out of the hives and gently shoo the bees off the frames with a soft-bristled brush, taking care to hurt as few as possible. Honey bees are precious, especially right now, because the species has been battling killer mites. Honey is a delicious byproduct of bee activity, but more important, it's thanks to honey bees that we get to eat fruits, vegetables, and even nuts. As bees forage for pollen and nectar to bring back to the hive, they pollinate plant life, making it possible for seed crops to grow. "If you can only say one thing in this story," pleads Lynn, "please tell your readers that if they ever find a colony, not to call an exterminator—call a beekeepers' association."



4

Beeswax is shaved from the frames with a heated knife; this is known as "capping." When capping, it's important to leave the honeycomb's wax cells intact. This way, when the frames are put back in the hives, the bees can focus on making honey, rather than on rebuilding the honeycombs. The capping knife needs to be hot enough to skim off the beeswax but not so hot that it destroys the honey's delicate nuances. Lynn uses every bit of byproduct from honey-making; she blends a rich hand salve from the skimmed beeswax, and she saves the propolis (the glue that bees make to fill in holes in the hive), which is also used in natural toothpaste and cosmetics for its healing properties.



5

The frames, dripping with honey, are placed in an extractor, a slotted centrifuge that spins the frames. Extraction is easier on a warm day, when honey flows more easily. Lynn and Jon never mix yields from different extractions. Each batch of honey has a flavor all its own, depending on the vegetation and varying with the season. The Weinbergers' property is dotted with the plants that bees love: wild hyacinth, rose geraniums, eucalyptus, lavender, rosemary. After a spin in the extractor, the honey is drained through a cloth sieve to remove tiny bits of beeswax, propolis scrapings, and the occasional bee wing.

Amy Albert is an associate editor for Fine Cooking. ♦

## Look beyond your cup of tea for many uses for honey



### Drizzle honey over:

- ♦ Pungent, blue-veined cheeses such as Roquefort, Gorgonzola, or Maytag blue, to savor with bread and walnuts.
- ♦ A bowl of rich, tangy yogurt.
- ♦ The traditional Catalan appetizer, *escalibada*, open-faced sandwiches of grilled bread and grilled red peppers, eggplant, tomato, and onions.

- ♦ Warm rice sprinkled with pistachios and drizzled with cream, for a simple dessert or sweet snack.

- ♦ Sliced apples (traditionally served to bring in a sweet year at Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year).

### Season with honey:

- ♦ Add a dash of honey to season mashed sweet potatoes and butter.
- ♦ Mix honey with mustard, orange juice, balsamic vinegar, and chopped fresh herbs for a sweet-and-sour glaze to brush on chicken or shrimp to bake or broil.
- ♦ Whisk a dab of honey into a vinaigrette of red-wine vinegar and olive oil.

### How to substitute honey for sugar in baking

**Substitute** honey for up to half the sugar, using 1 part honey for every 1 ¼ parts sugar.

**Reduce** the liquid in the recipe by ¼ cup for each cup of honey.

**Add** ½ teaspoon baking soda for each cup of honey to counter its acidity and weight.

**Lower** the oven temperature by 25 degrees to prevent excess browning.



MASTER CLASS

# Light and Delicate Tempura

A user-friendly batter eliminates the risk of overmixing and produces a crisp, lacy, featherlight coating

BY KATY SPARKS

**Y**ou might think that a chef who was born and raised in Vermont, as I was, has as much business writing about tempura as a chef from Tokyo has writing about cheeseburgers. But any chef is bound to love the Japanese approach to cooking, an approach that puts a premium on using the freshest, best-quality ingredients and letting their natural flavors take center stage. Among Japanese cooking techniques, tempura is one of my favorites.

Tempura (the word refers to both the cooking method and the finished dish) is a wonderful frying technique that adds flavor and texture to food without competing with its natural flavor. Raw vegetables or seafood are dunked in a simple batter and then briefly fried in a mild-flavored oil, just long enough for the batter to crisp and the food to cook through. As the batter cooks, it forms a translucent



**Crispy wisps of batter and a speckling of black sesame seeds give these shrimp and vegetable tempura textural appeal as well as visual allure.**



**"You don't need any special equipment for tempura," says Katy Sparks. "Just a sharp knife for cutting and a large pot for frying."**

coating that protects the tempura and prevents it from absorbing too much oil. Unlike some versions of batter-fried food, tempura tastes clean, fresh, and delicate.

As a technique, tempura is straightforward, and it also adapts well to American ingredients. If certain aspects of the technique don't feel intuitive at first, particularly the slam-dunk method of battering and frying, don't be discouraged. You'll soon become proficient, and eventually tempura will become as

## Prepare the vegetables and shrimp



Prep the vegetables and shrimp, referring to the chart on p. 61. Dry the vegetables and the shrimp well and set aside.

## Heat the oil and make the dipping sauce



Pour 3 to 4 inches of oil into a deep, heavy pot. Begin heating the oil to between 350° and 360°F.



Meanwhile, in a measuring cup or a small bowl, stir together the lemon juice, water, mirin, and soy sauce. Set aside.

valuable to your cooking repertoire as roasting or braising.

### Search out seasonal vegetables and top-quality seafood

I make tempura all year long, but the vegetables I choose to fry change with the seasons. Finding exceptional ingredients is my priority, and that usually means sticking with seasonal food.

**Vegetables with assertive flavors and a low water content work best for tempura.** At this time of year, I turn to bell peppers, eggplant, green beans, and summer squashes like zucchini (with blossoms, if possible). I also dip fresh basil leaves in tempura batter (one side only) for a pretty garnish to a platter of summer vegetables. Cooler-weather vegetable candidates include carrots, sweet potatoes, and celery root. Sweet onions and fresh shiitake mushrooms are also wonderful for tempura.

In the seafood department, try shrimp and calamari tempura-style. I prefer white or pink shrimp from the Gulf or from Central or South America. They aren't cheap, but their firmness and their clean, iodine-free taste make them worth the expense.

**Cut the vegetables to sizes and shapes that let them cook at the same rate as the batter.** Large vegetables should be cut into slices, thin strips, or

chunks (see the chart on p. 61 for cutting techniques for specific ingredients); smaller, quick-cooking items such as green beans and shiitake mushrooms can be left whole. It isn't necessary to dredge the ingredients in flour because my tempura batter clings well enough without it. But do make sure the vegetables and seafood are dry, and season the seafood with salt and pepper just before dipping it in the batter.

At the restaurant, I have a professional deep-fryer that regulates the oil temperature. But at home it's easy enough to use a large, deep cooking vessel and an accurate frying thermometer to monitor the oil. The pot should be made of heavy-gauge metal—cast iron or enameled iron are ideal because they retain heat so well. Use a pot at least eight inches deep so you can fill it with three to four inches of oil and still have a couple of inches on top to allow for splatters and bubbling. You'll also need a mesh skimmer, called a spider, to lift the tempura out of the oil.

**Use a mild vegetable oil with a high smoke point, such as canola or safflower oil.** I like canola because it's virtually tasteless. Be sure the pot is completely dry before adding the oil; water causes hot oil to splatter. If you plan to reuse the oil after frying tempura, let the oil cool completely and then strain it and store in a cool, dark place. Used oil turns rancid more quickly than fresh oil, so check it before using it again.



## Whisk the batter over an ice bath



In a medium bowl set over an ice bath, combine the flour and cornstarch; whisk to blend. Whisk in the club soda gradually.

Heat the oil to between 350° and 360°F and monitor it periodically to maintain a constant temperature. If the temperature drops too much, the batter will absorb too much oil and you'll get a ghastly result: greasy tempura. If the oil is too hot, the batter will brown before the food is cooked through.

### A cornstarch and club soda batter buys time

Traditional tempura batter consists of just three ingredients: egg yolks, ice water, and flour. The yolks provide richness and flavor, and the flour gives structure. But the batter is tricky to use—it must be extremely undermixed to prevent gluten development, which would make the tempura tough, and it must be used within twenty minutes.

Since I'm busy enough in the restaurant without having to deal with fickle batters, I've come up with a version that's less temperamental and just as superb as, if not better than, the traditional version. My batter, which uses cornstarch, club soda, and flour, contradicts the conventional wisdom of tempura, which is to always undermix the batter. In fact, this batter, which I call my “workhorse” batter, performs best when it's smooth and lump-free; it's virtually impossible to overmix it.

The cornstarch, which has no protein and therefore no ability to form gluten, keeps the tempura from



Continue whisking until the batter is smooth, and then add the herbs and sesame seeds.

getting tough. The carbonation in the club soda creates an airy batter, which produces light tempura. It's true that some of the bubbles are lost during stirring, but if you set the batter over an ice bath to keep it cold, most of the aeration is preserved. Without egg yolks, the batter lacks a certain richness, so I compensate by whisking in minced fresh herbs or spices.

Although my flour, cornstarch, and club soda batter holds up well over time, it should still be prepared at the last minute since it performs best when freshly made. Sometimes the batter needs a bit of tweaking. Flours can vary in how much liquid they absorb, and humidity can play a role, too, so you may need to add a drop more club soda or a bit more flour to get the right consistency. The batter should be whisked until it's very smooth and just thick enough to coat the back of a spoon like a custard sauce.

I think that tempura is most interesting visually and texturally when it has a translucent, almost lacy crust. If you decide that you prefer a thicker coating, you can add more flour to the batter.

### Dunk in batter, lay in hot oil, and fry until crisp and golden

Once the vegetables are cut, the oil is up to temperature, and the batter is mixed, you're ready to start frying. Prepare a workspace next to the stovetop, if



The batter should coat the back of a spoon as a custard would; your finger pulled across the spoon should leave a clear line. If it's too thin, whisk in a tablespoon or two more flour and add more herbs and sesame seeds, if you like.

## Fry the tempura



Set up a workspace next to the oil: the vegetables and shrimp, seasoned with salt and pepper, on the far side, the bowl of batter over an ice bath, and then the hot oil, which should be up to temperature. On the other side, set a tray or plate lined with paper towels.

possible (as described above). I keep a damp towel nearby in case I get overzealous with the dipping; this isn't a tidy endeavor, in any case.

**Immerse an ingredient in the batter, lift it out with your hand, and quickly lay it in the hot oil.** You'll be tempted to shake off excess batter, but *don't do it*. The key is to lift out the fully coated item and immediately put it in the oil without a moment's hesitation. This will probably feel unnatural at first, and it will definitely be messy, as batter drips between the bowl and the pot. But this unhesitating technique is essential to achieving the thin, crispy coating that makes tempura so enticing. If you feel uneasy using your hands, use tongs or chopsticks.

**Fry the tempura in small batches.** Frying just four to six pieces at a time helps keep the oil temperature from dropping suddenly and gives each piece enough space to cook. If the pieces float toward each other, act like a 1950s sock-hop chaperone and separate them with a firm nudge from your mesh skimmer.

Sprinkle salt, pepper, and any other spices on the tempura as soon as they come out of the oil so the seasonings stick. Since the delicate coating doesn't last much longer than a few minutes, serve each batch of tempura right away. An open kitchen is an advantage; while your guests are enjoying the first round of tempura, you can be frying the next one. If that's not feasible, you can hold the finished tempura in a 200°F oven while you complete the frying.

It's traditional to serve the tempura with a dipping sauce of soy sauce and mirin, a sweet rice wine. The one I suggest here includes lemon juice and is intended to mimic the Japanese *ponzu* sauce.



**Dunk a vegetable or shrimp in the batter to coat well and, without shaking off excess batter, quickly but carefully lay it in the hot oil (the batter will drip).** The oil may spatter; you may want to use tongs. Repeat with three to five more pieces and monitor the temperature.

## RECIPE

### Summer Tempura

*Serves eight as an appetizer; six as a main course.*

#### FOR THE VEGETABLES & SHRIMP:

**A mix of summer vegetables, such as the following:**

- ◆ 1 medium zucchini
- ◆ 1 red bell pepper
- ◆ 16 green beans (¼ lb.)
- ◆ ½ lb. fresh shiitake mushrooms
- ◆ 1 medium sweet onion
- ◆ ½ small eggplant
- ◆ 1 bunch asparagus (about 16)

**1 lb. shrimp (preferably very large)**

**About 3½ qt. canola oil for deep-frying**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

#### FOR THE DIPPING SAUCE:

**Juice of 2 lemons (about ½ cup)**

**¼ cup water**

**¼ cup mirin**

**1 cup soy sauce, preferably dark**

#### FOR THE BATTER:

**1⅓ cups all-purpose flour; more as needed**

**1½ cups cornstarch**

**2 cups club soda**

**About ¼ cup finely chopped herbs (such as parsley, chives, thyme, rosemary); more to taste**

**About ¼ cup sesame seeds (preferably a mix of black and white); more to taste**

For the procedure, review the text and follow the photos and captions starting on p. 58.





Fry the tempura until the batter turns a very pale gold and the food is tender but still a little firm, 2 to 3 minutes. If the pieces huddle together, separate them with a mesh skimmer. Turn the pieces if necessary.



With a mesh skimmer, transfer the tempura to a paper-towel-lined plate; sprinkle with salt and pepper. Continue dipping more pieces in the batter (stirring between rounds) and frying. Skim off batter particles from the oil as necessary. Serve the tempura with individual bowls of dipping sauce.

Katy Sparks is the chef at Quilty's in New York City. ♦

## How to cut vegetables and seafood for tempura

One of the delights of tempura is the interesting shapes that the food takes on during frying. You can take some liberties in how you prepare the vegetables, but be sure that they're cut so that they'll be tender inside just when the batter is crisp and golden. Here are some suggested cutting techniques. Remember to dry all ingredients thoroughly before dunking them in the tempura batter.

### VEGETABLES

zucchini and yellow squash	cut on a sharp angle to make elongated ovals, $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick, or cut in lengthwise wedges, 3 to 4 inches long
bell peppers	core and seed, remove all pith, and cut lengthwise into strips, $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide
shiitake mushrooms	remove stems and fry the caps whole or cut out a decorative star on top
green beans	trim ends and fry whole
sweet onions (such as Vidalia or Walla Walla)	before peeling, cut into rings 1 inch thick; then pull off outer layer of skin
eggplant	cut in half lengthwise, cut half moons $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick; sprinkle lightly with salt and let sit for 20 minutes to purge bitter juices; rinse and pat dry
asparagus	trim off all of the woody base with a decorative bias cut
sweet potatoes and celery root	peel and cut into batons, $\frac{1}{4} \times 2$ inches
carrots and parsnips	cut on a sharp angle to make elongated ovals, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick
taro root	peel and cut very thin, $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick
lotus root	cut in cross sections to reveal the beautiful seed pod pattern, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick

### SEAFOOD

shrimp	peel and devein, leaving on the tail (and head, if you like); season with salt and pepper just before dipping in batter
squid	cut into rings; season with salt and pepper just before dipping in batter



# Choose the Ripest Fruit for Juicy Desserts

Use touch, smell, and sight to choose the best stone fruit, and then let it star in classic American desserts

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

**Get to know the personalities of the different varieties of stone fruit.** Pictured here, apricots, yellow- and white-fleshed nectarines, Dino-saur Egg plums, Black Beauty plums, Santa Rosa plums, Italian prune plums, greengage plums, shiro plums, white- and yellow-fleshed peaches, and doughnut peaches.

I spend a lot of time in grocery stores and markets buying food for my job and for my own cooking at home. In the summertime, regardless of what's on my shopping list, I'm always lured to the peaches, plums, apricots, and nectarines by their intoxicating fragrance. When stone fruit are perfectly ripe, they just beg to be scooped up and devoured—or turned into classic summer desserts—but to tell if the fruit is really ripe, I need to really get involved with the fruit. With visions of shortcakes and cobblers and upside-down cakes in my head, I begin to touch the peaches and sniff the apricots. I do get plenty of funny looks from other shoppers, but they usually wind up asking me to help them choose some ripe fruit. It's really very easy.

**Use your senses.** I take the threefold approach to selecting all my fruit. First I smell it. Fragrance is the primary indicator of ripeness. If it doesn't smell like a peach or a plum, I move on. Next I hold the fruit in my hand and press it gently on its shoulders; the fruit should give slightly. Finally I give the piece a “once-over,” looking for well-colored, smooth-skinned fruit without bruises or blemishes.

**Pass over the underripe fruit.** Don't be fooled into thinking that cooking will improve the taste of





A fresh compote of plums and apricots with mint and orange juice makes a juicy topping for shortcakes.

fruit that isn't quite ripe. Baked fruit is a concentrated version of its fresh counterpart, so if it isn't sweet and delicious when fresh, don't expect much once it's been baked. The fruit's natural sweetness and flavors must be developed—stone fruit may soften in texture after they're picked from the tree, but they never really become sweeter (see Food Science, *Fine Cooking* #28, p. 84). I don't buy stone fruit that doesn't have at least a hint of fragrance, and I don't bake with anything I wouldn't eat fresh. I try to choose the ripest fruit I can at the market and use it the same day.

But if slightly underripe fruit is your only option, you can let the fruit rest on your countertop for a day or two to soften. Just be careful not to let them become overripe. Apricots are especially perishable; there's a very small window of time between just-ripe and overripe apricots. Once stone fruit are ripe,

you can store them in the refrigerator (which slows the ripening process) if you need to buy yourself some time.

**I like simple flavors and preparations for summer stone fruit.** Ripe summer peaches, plums, apricots, and nectarines are loaded with flavor, so they don't need a lot of embellishment; a subtle hint of flavor and sweetness is all that's needed to heighten what nature has already supplied. For instance, I like to make a compote of (uncooked) sliced plums and apricots with just a touch of orange and mint for a refreshing topping to light, buttery shortcakes. I let the fruit mixture sit for an hour or so to let all the flavors mingle. You could make the simplest of summer desserts just from a dish of sliced stone fruit that have been allowed to macerate in their own juices for a short time. Slice and combine the fruit only an hour or two before dinner, however;

## Peel not

I never peel my stone fruit. I don't think that the final result warrants the painstaking, time-consuming peeling process. In fact, I *like* keeping the skin on the fruit: it adds a deeper, richer color to compotes and baked desserts, and it helps retain the fruit's nutritional content. The tougher skins of peaches and nectarines do however need some attention. I gently prick



the skin with the sharp tines of a fork several times around the fruit before I proceed with the recipe. This method breaks up the fibrous skin during baking, yet keeps the flavors intact without bruising the flesh.





**Leave a 3-inch border when piling plums on the galette dough; lift the dough up and around the filling, pleating as you go.**



**Abby Dodge crushes sugar cubes to make a crunchy topping for the plum galette.**

**As the plums bake, the galette will spread and flatten. Use a rimmed sheet pan to catch juices that may leak out.**

any longer and the flesh will become mushy.

That lovely flavor of mingling stone fruit juices intensifies when the fruit are baked—the secret to delicious summer cobblers. Jumbling peaches, apricots, and plums together in an almond-topped cobbler offers a complex blend of flavors, yet it doesn't overwhelm the fruit with distracting ingredients.

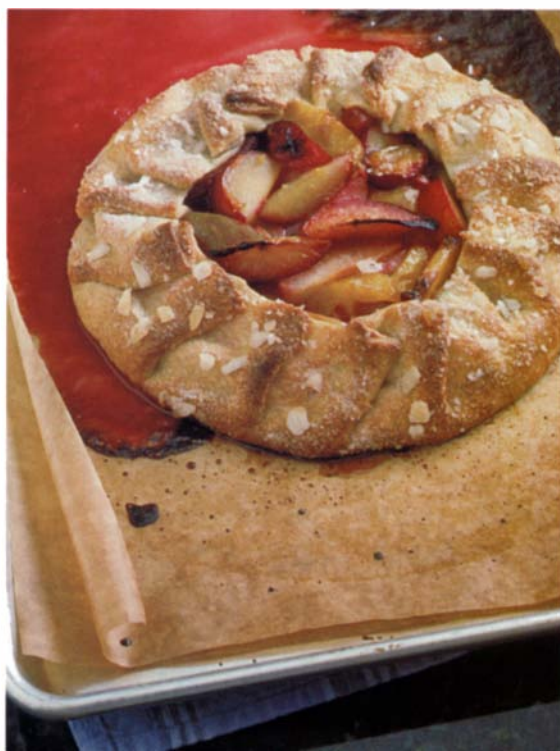
There's no doubt, too, that a cobbler topping, a shortcake, or a light spice cake, as in the recipe for Upside-Down Apricot Cake on p. 67, provides the perfect base to soak up the juiciness of the fruit, as well as supplying a slightly savory contrast for the fruit's sweetness. And one of the most beautiful and delicious ways to showcase these fruit is by baking them into a rustic galette. Again, I pair just a little bit of lemon with plums to enhance, but not disguise, their flavor. Letting the fruit star in these simple preparations is the whole idea.

## RECIPES

### Summer Stone Fruit Shortcakes

I like to cut these tender shortcakes into square pieces so as not to waste the dough. Feel free to use any combination of sliced stone fruit in place of the plums and apricots we've used here. Serve a little vanilla ice cream on the side, if you like.

*Serves six.*



#### FOR THE FRUIT TOPPING:

**3 large, ripe plums, pitted and cut in ½-inch wedges**  
**4 large, ripe apricots, pitted and cut in ½-inch wedges**

**¼ cup lightly packed mint leaves, cut into thin strips**  
**3 to 4 Tbs. sugar, depending on the sweetness of your fruit**

**3 Tbs. fresh orange juice**

#### FOR THE SHORTCAKES:

**12¼ oz. (2¾ cups) all-purpose flour**

**¼ cup sugar**

**2 Tbs. baking powder**

**1 tsp. salt**

**4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into pieces and chilled**

**1 cup buttermilk**

**1 tsp. vanilla extract**

**To make the topping**—Toss the plums and apricots with the mint, sugar, and orange juice. Cover and refrigerate, stirring occasionally, until the flavors blend, at least 1 hour but not longer than 4 hours.

**To make the shortcakes**—Heat the oven to 400°F and line a baking sheet with parchment (or use an ungreased pan). In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt until well blended. With a pastry blender, cut in the butter until the pieces are no larger than a pea. Add the buttermilk and vanilla extract and gently toss until just blended. (The dough will be shaggy, not completely bound together.) Scrape the dough from the bowl onto counter. Quickly and gently pat the dough into a 6x4-inch rectangle. Lightly flour a large, sharp knife and trim off any raggedy edges. Cut the dough in half lengthwise and then in thirds across to form six squares, lightly flouring the knife between cuts. Put the squares on the baking sheet and bake until puffed and golden brown, 20 to 25 min. Cool on a rack. Serve warm or at room temperature.

**To assemble the dessert**—Split the shortcakes in half crosswise and put each bottom on a serving plate. Spoon a generous amount of the fruit mixture, including the juice, onto the shortcake bottoms. Cover with the shortcake tops. Serve immediately.

### Plum Galette with Lemon Crust

You can make and chill the dough for this rustic tart a day in advance, and you can bake the galette several hours ahead and keep it at room temperature. *Serves six to ten.*

#### FOR THE GALETTE DOUGH:

**9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose flour**

**3 Tbs. sugar**

**1 tsp. grated lemon zest**

**¼ tsp. salt**

**5 oz. (10 Tbs.) unsalted butter, very cold, cut into ½-inch pieces**

**⅓ cup very cold water**

#### FOR THE PLUM FILLING:

**½ cup sugar**

**3 Tbs. all-purpose flour**

**½ tsp. grated lemon zest**

**2 lb. ripe plums, pitted and cut in ¾-inch wedges**

*(Ingredient list continues)*



# Remove pits from stone fruits with a few cuts

## *Give peaches and nectarines a twist*



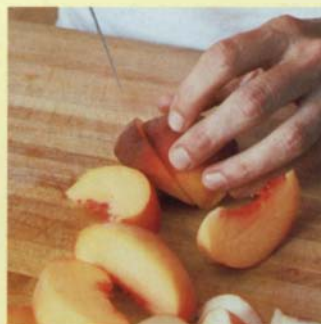
Using a small, sharp knife, start at the stem end of the fruit and cut through to the pit. Run the knife all the way around the fruit, keeping the blade up against the pit, finishing where you started.



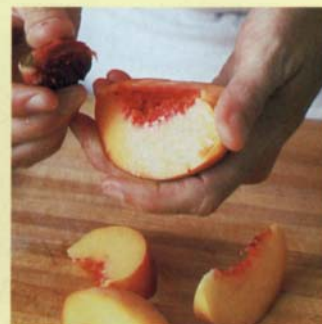
Hold the fruit in your hands with the cut mark parallel to your palms and gently twist in opposite directions until one half comes free from the pit. Set that half aside.



Remove the pit from the remaining half by loosening the pointed end with your fingernail or the tip of a knife.



If the pit doesn't come free right away, don't force it. This will only damage the flesh. Instead, cut off a few sections from the half.



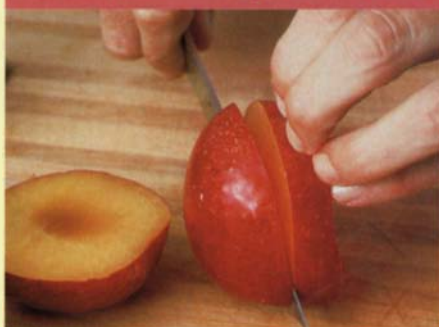
You'll then be able to wiggle the pit free.

## *Apricots are easy*

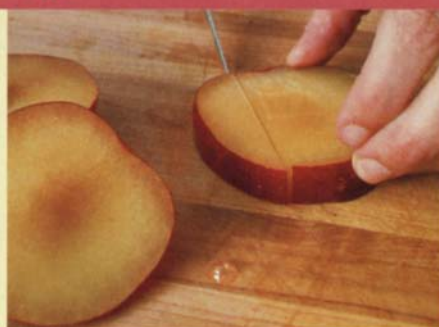


Follow the first step for pitting peaches and nectarines (above); then gently pull one half away from the pit (no twisting necessary) and pop out the pit.

## *Cut a plum as you would a mango*



Make two vertical cuts on either side of the center of the plum, about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch apart.



Set aside the two cheeks for slicing, and trim a wedge from each side of the center piece. Discard the pit.





**For a custom cobbler,** choose any combination of stone fruit you like. Toss the sliced fruit with brown sugar, flour, and orange zest to make the filling.



**Use your hands** to scoop the juicy filling into a shallow baking dish. Then spread it evenly.

**Look for bubbling juices** around the edge of the golden-brown almond topping to know when to remove the cobbler from the oven.



**1 tsp. vanilla extract**  
**2 Tbs. milk**  
**¼ cup coarsely crushed sugar cubes (about 12)**

**To make the dough**—Combine the flour, sugar, lemon zest, and salt in a food processor and pulse briefly to combine. Add the butter pieces and pulse until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Drizzle the water evenly over the crumbs and process just until the dough is moist but still crumbly. Turn the dough out onto the counter and shape it into a 5-inch disk. Wrap and refrigerate until firm and chilled, at least 1 hour.

**To fill and bake the galette**—Heat the oven to 400°F. In a large bowl, whisk together the sugar, flour, and lemon zest. Add the plums and vanilla extract and toss until combined. Set aside.

Roll the dough between two large pieces of parchment, lightly flouring when necessary, to form a rough circle slightly larger than 14 inches and about ⅛ inch thick. Trim off excess dough to make an even 14-inch round. Roll the dough around the rolling pin and transfer it to a parchment-lined rimmed sheet pan or jelly roll pan. The dough will hang slightly over the edges of the pan for now.

Pile the filling into the center of the dough, leaving a 3-inch rim of dough. Fold the dough edge up and over the filling, pleating the dough as you go. (The galette will flatten out as it bakes.) Press the pleats gently to seal. Brush the dough with the milk and sprinkle the dough and fruit with the crushed sugar cubes, pressing on the sugar lightly to make it adhere. Bake until the fruit is tender and the crust is browned, 45 to 50 min. Serve warm or at room temperature.

## Summer Stone Fruit & Almond Cobbler

I like to include a mix of apricots, white peaches, nectarines, and Black Beauty plums in this cobbler. *Serves eight.*

### FOR THE FILLING:

**4 lb. assorted ripe stone fruit, rinsed and pitted**  
 (prick the skins of peaches and nectarines first)  
**½ cup packed light brown sugar**  
**3 Tbs. all-purpose flour**  
**½ tsp. grated orange zest**

### FOR THE TOPPING:

**4½ oz. (1 cup) all-purpose flour**  
**2 oz. (½ cup) ground, toasted almonds**  
**½ cup sugar**  
**2½ tsp. baking powder**  
**¼ tsp. salt**  
**1 large egg**  
**½ cup buttermilk**  
**3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted and cooled**  
**½ tsp. vanilla extract**  
**2 Tbs. toasted sliced almonds**

Heat the oven to 375°F. Lightly butter a 9x13-inch baking dish.

**To make the filling**—Cut peaches and nectarines into ½-inch wedges. Cut plums into ¾-inch wedges and apricots into quarters. In a medium bowl, toss the fruit with the brown sugar, flour, and orange zest until well blended. Pile the fruit into the prepared baking dish and spread evenly.





**Before removing the cake pan, let the inverted apricot upside-down cake rest for 5 minutes.**

**To make the topping**—In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, ground almonds, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Beat the egg into the buttermilk and add this to the flour mixture, along with the butter and vanilla extract. Gently stir just until the dry ingredients are moistened. Drop by spoonfuls onto the fruit filling, leaving about a 1-inch border of fruit. Sprinkle the toasted almond slices over the topping. Bake until the fruit is bubbling and the topping is browned (a pick will come out clean), 50 to 55 min. Serve warm or at room temperature.

### Upside-Down Apricot Cake

I usually use a clear Pyrex baking dish for this cake; I like the fact that I can see the bottom of the dessert when I flip it over to unmold, and it's an easy dish to maneuver. *Serves eight to ten.*

#### FOR THE CARAMEL:

**½ cup sugar**  
**3 Tbs. water**

#### FOR THE CAKE:

**4 medium, ripe apricots, pitted and cut into four wedges each**  
**9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose flour**  
**1½ tsp. baking powder**  
**¼ tsp. ground cinnamon**  
**¼ tsp. salt**

**4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature**  
**1 cup sugar**  
**½ tsp. vanilla extract**  
**2 large eggs**  
**¾ cup milk**

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Lightly butter the sides of a 9-inch square cake pan.

**To make the caramel**—In a small, heavy-based saucepan or skillet, combine the sugar and water. Set over medium heat, stirring frequently to help dissolve the sugar. Once the sugar boils, stop stirring. Increase the heat to high and cook until the liquid is deep amber. Immediately pour the caramel into the cake pan and swirl to cover the bottom evenly. Set aside to cool.

**To make the cake**—Arrange the apricot wedges over the caramel and set the pan aside. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, cinnamon, and salt until blended. In another bowl, beat the butter, sugar, and vanilla extract with an electric mixer until well blended, about 3 min. Add the eggs one at a time and beat until just incorporated. Using a wide rubber spatula, fold the flour mixture and the milk alternately into the butter mixture, beginning and ending with the flour. Spoon large dollops of batter evenly into the cake pan, taking care not to disturb the fruit. Tap the pan gently on the counter to release air bubbles. Bake until lightly browned and a pick comes out clean, 50 to 55 min.

Working quickly (while the caramel is still hot), run a knife around the edge of the cake. Set a serving plate or a small cutting board on top of the pan and invert it (be careful—it's hot). Let the cake rest, upside down, for 5 min. before removing the pan so the fruit and caramel will settle. Serve slightly warm or at room temperature.

*Abigail Johnson Dodge is the author of Great Fruit Desserts (Rizzoli) and the test kitchen director for Fine Cooking. ♦*

### Fresh fruit from the freezer



Got a few extra ripe peaches? Pit and cut them in chunks (don't bother to peel), toss them in the food processor with a tablespoon of sugar per peach, and purée. Freeze the mixture in ice-cube trays. When you want a simple, refreshing dessert, quickly pulse about four cubes per serving in the food processor and scoop into bowls.



### wine choices

## Fragrant, peachy Muscat is a soul mate for stone fruit desserts

Summer desserts made with the freshest, ripest fruits—what could be more delectable? How about letting a glass of dessert wine help elevate their flavors? As always, if the flavors of the wine can match some of the flavors in the food, the pairing will really soar. Muscat, an under-appreciated yet extremely versatile wine grape that's made into wines with varying levels of sweetness, deserves its day in the summer sun; it's ideal with these recipes.

From Asti, in the Piemonte region of Italy, try Michele Chiarlo's delightful sparkler Nivole, which shows the classic balance of stone fruit and fragrant flowers that characterize the Muscat varietal.

You've got delicious choices in still wines, too. Robert Pecota makes a fine Muscat from California's Napa Valley called Moscato d'Andrea that's loaded with apricot, nectarine, and florals. It's medium-sweet, with crisp acidity to keep it lively and balanced. From France,

try Jaboulet's Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise—ripe, rich, and intense.

Sweeter, because the grapes actually get frozen (only the water freezes, so the sugar, acid, and flavor become concentrated), is Bonny Doon's Muscat Vin de Glacière. Just remember, the sweeter the dessert, the sweeter the wine should be for the wine to show everything it's got.

*Rosina Tinari Wilson teaches and writes about food and wine in the San Francisco Bay area.*

## How to buy the sweetest scallops



Although we all recognize the ubiquitous fan shape of the scallop shell, many of us are confused when it comes to distinguishing what's *inside* the shell.

Scallops are bivalves (mollusks with two hinged shells), but they're unique in that the muscle that opens and closes the two shells (the adductor)

is, in fact, the sweet, tender nugget of meat we like to eat.

Although there are hundreds of species of scallops in the world's oceans and bays, only a handful are commonly available. The largest and most popular are **sea scallops**, primarily harvested in the Atlantic from Eastern Canada to North Carolina, but also from

Peru, Japan, and Russia. Available year-round, sea scallops are sorted and marketed by size, with the most popular about 1 to 1½ inches in diameter and ¾ to 1 inch high. It usually takes 20 to 30 of these sea scallops to total 1 pound (you'll see them marked 20/30 count). They range as large as U-5s (5 per pound) and as small as 40/50 count. Typically, the larger the scallop, the higher the price.

**Bay scallops** are smaller than sea scallops (about ½-inch in diameter, 50 to 100 per pound) and are considered to be the sweetest and most succulent. Cape bays harvested from Long Island to Cape Cod are especially prized. Sold fresh, these bay scallops are a seasonal specialty (available in the fall and early winter), and are generally quite expensive. Less desirable are frozen Chinese bay scallops which have been imported in increasingly



**Scallops in the shell are a rare sight in seafood stores. Usually farm-raised, they're delicious; just be sure they're very fresh.**

large numbers in recent years.

A third variety is now available in the markets. **Calico scallops**, harvested from the warm Atlantic and Gulf coasts of Florida as well as Central and South America, are even smaller than bay scallops (100 to 200 per pound), but they're the least expensive—and the least esteemed. Most com-

## Choosing chicken—roasters vs. broiler-fryers

When I go to the store to buy a chicken to roast for my small family, I end up with something labeled "broiler-fryer." I'm not worried that I might be courting failure by roasting something designed for the broiler because I've discovered (after many wonderful dinners and a little research) that this label is merely a classification of age, and therefore an indication of tenderness and size, not a recommendation for how to cook it.

A **broiler-fryer** (left) comes to market after six to eight weeks and weighs 3 to 4 pounds, according to the National

Chicken Council. The name reflects the fact that the young and tender meat is best cooked with high heat, making it the ideal bird to cut up or butterfly for the grill, broiler, sauté pan, or frying pan. The tender, mild-tasting meat and relatively small parts make them a poor choice for a stew or a braise, where they would tend to dry out. Left whole, a broiler-fryer makes a fine roast chicken, although the yield is a bit less than a larger bird—a 4-pound chicken barely serves four, while a 7-pound roaster can serve eight.



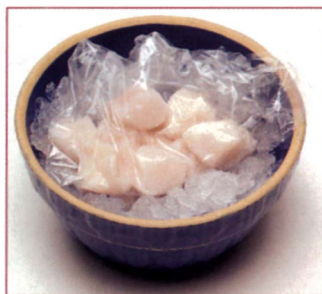
**A roaster** (right) or roasting chicken is older—three to five months—and weighs 5 to 7 pounds, according to the

National Chicken Council. A roaster has a thicker layer of fat, which helps baste the bird as it roasts. The meatier parts are also fine cut up for stews or braises. But a roaster isn't as good for grilling, broiling, or frying since the larger, thicker pieces will overcook (or burn) on the outside before cooking through. Also, its slightly tougher, more flavorful meat benefits from the slower cooking of roasting, braising, and stewing.



mercial calico scallops have been briefly steamed in order to quickly shuck them, so their flavor and texture are compromised. Calicos are often mislabeled as bay scallops. While their cheap price should be a dead giveaway, calicos are generally smaller and darker than true bays. In my fish market in Vermont, I usually see calicos for about \$5 per pound; bay scallops, when in season, can be anywhere from \$14 to over \$20 per pound—but they're worth it. Sea scallops aren't cheap either—between \$9 and \$12 per pound in my market.

**Ask the fishmonger for “dry” scallops.** Freshly harvested scallops are 75% to 79% water, but in the hours,



**Put 'em on ice.** Keep bagged scallops on ice in the fridge.

days, and sometimes weeks before scallops reach your kitchen, they begin to dry out and lose moisture. To offset this, commercial fisheries have developed a method of soaking fresh scallops in a solution of salts and water (sodium tripolyphosphate, or STP) to plump the scallops and keep them fresher longer. Unfortunately, not only are you paying for this extra water, but you're getting an inferior product. The soaking detracts from a scallop's natural fresh, briny

taste, and when you try to sauté a soaked or “wet” scallop, it instantly sheds all its excess water when it hits the hot pan. You wind up steaming your scallops rather than searing them, and the texture of the meat tends to be rubbery.

In a truth-in-labeling initiative, the FDA issued a policy in 1992 urging retailers to label scallops that have been treated with STP. It's worthwhile to seek out a fishmonger who sells “dry” scallops (many do), but if you wind up having to cook “wet” scallops, be sure to dry them thoroughly with paper towels before cooking.

**As with any seafood, shop for scallops with your eyes and nose.** Fresh scallops should appear moist but not milky. Refuse any that have a feathery white surface (a sign of freezer burn) or dried and darkened edges (a sign of age). Always ask to smell scallops before buying. They should smell somewhat briny and seaweedy, but not offensive, sharp, or at all like iodine. If the scallops have no smell and a uniform stark-white color, chances are they've been soaked in STP.

**Cook scallops the day you buy them, if possible.** If not, store them in the coldest part of your refrigerator. I sometimes nest the bag or container in a larger bowl of ice to ensure that they really stay cold. But avoid direct contact with ice—it will leach flavor and deteriorate the texture of the scallops. Also, try not to rinse scallops, as this will wash away flavor.

*Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.* ♦

## A quick, neat way to cut a bell pepper

Because of their puzzling shape, bell peppers can be difficult to cut into consistently even slices. I've found that the method shown below produces the best results.



**1** With a sharp chef's knife, cut off the top of the pepper just below the shoulder so that you remove the entire stem end, exposing the ribs inside the pepper.



**2** Squarely cut off the narrow bottom. Reserve the trimmed ends. The pepper will now be shaped like a cylinder.



**3** Set the pepper on one end and, with the tip of your knife, make one neat vertical slice to open the cylinder.



**4** Set the pepper skin side down and work the knife along the inside of the pepper (with the blade parallel to the work surface), removing the ribs and seeds while unrolling the pepper so that it lies flat.



**5** You now have a neat rectangle of bell pepper that you can julienne or dice. You can trim and chop the reserved ends as well.

# Parsley Is More Than Just a Pretty Face

Once woven into wreaths that crowned ancient Olympic athletes, parsley has long been used as decoration. In more recent times, restaurants used the herb merely as a garnish, a bit of color on the plate not meant to be eaten.

Yet as most chefs today know, this familiar herb offers much more than ornamentation. Added at the last minute to a long-cooking stew, parsley single-handedly brightens up the flavor of the dish. Whole leaves tossed in a green salad contribute a clean, peppery bite; chopped leaves add color and flavor to most pastas.

The robust cuisines of the Mediterranean have made great use of parsley as a flavoring. The French mix chopped garlic with parsley for a garnish called a *persillade* (pronounced pehr-see-YAHD), which is sprinkled on everything from mushrooms to fish and beef. (*Persil* is French for parsley.) Parsley is also classically combined with thyme and bay leaves in a *bouquet garni* to flavor stocks. In the Middle East, parsley is the main ingredient for the grain salad called *tabbouleh*. And in Italy, parsley is among the most important of flavorings, right up there with olive oil and garlic.

## Green color, green flavor

When I think of parsley's flavor, I imagine the color green. Its lush, verdant taste reminds me of the smell of a fresh-cut lawn. It's the flat-leaf variety, also called Italian parsley, that gets me so excited. The curly

leaf variety is much milder, although it can add an interesting texture, if not flavor, to a green salad. Flat-leaf parsley has a pronounced aroma and a pleasantly bitter flavor.

**A little butter or oil helps carry parsley's flavor.** As with most aromatic herbs, the flavor of parsley is captured best in the fat used in the dish. A flavored butter, also known as a compound butter, is a great way to showcase parsley's flavor (see the box below).

As for dried parsley, it lacks the very thing that fresh parsley adds to a dish—freshness—so I don't even think about using it.

## Keep parsley on hand

Parsley is sold in inexpensive bunches year-round. If you tend to use only a few sprigs from the bunch before it fades, my advice is simple: use more and use it more often. I frequently double the amount a recipe calls for because any dish that has parsley in it can benefit from some chopped leaves sprinkled on top, both

for looks and for an additional flavor boost.

## Treat parsley well and it will last a while.

At the market, look for bright-green, lively bunches. Obviously, you want to avoid those that are wilted or yellowed, but you should also pass on those whose leaves have lost their slight shine, a sign that the plant and its flavor are fading.

Because parsley grows in sandy soils, it needs to be thoroughly washed. Though some people suggest only washing herbs when you're ready to use them, I use parsley so much that I wash it as soon as I get it home. Loosen the bunch and wash it in a few rinses of tepid water and then dry it well in a salad spinner or by blotting it with a clean towel.

## Experiment with parsley

- ◆ Add chopped parsley to browned butter. Season with lemon, salt, and pepper; drizzle the sauce over grilled fish.
- ◆ Fry parsley for a festive, flavorful garnish. Mix flour with wine to make a thin batter. Coat the sprigs and fry until just golden.
- ◆ Mix chopped parsley with minced garlic and breadcrumbs to make a savory crust for roast lamb or a baked bean gratin.
- ◆ Flavor mashed potatoes with a pesto made with parsley, olive oil, and garlic.
- ◆ Toss whole curly parsley leaves with sun-dried tomatoes, prosciutto, and parmigiano reggiano. Dress with a light oil and vinegar dressing for a different, vividly flavored salad.



You can simply wrap the parsley in a paper towel inside a plastic bag or treat it like a bouquet. Put the stems in a jar or glass filled with water and then cover the leaves loosely with a plastic bag. Change the water every other day.

**Dry the herb well before chopping.** I often wash my parsley a second time just before using it to be sure I've gotten rid of any traces of gritty sand. Then I dry it well to get better, more precise cuts. Use a very sharp knife to chop parsley leaves. (You can use the strong-flavored stems to flavor soups and stocks; strain them out before using.)

Finally, parsley certainly can pretty up a plate. Unlike many leafy herbs, parsley won't blacken once chopped and so it looks great longer. So go ahead and use it for decoration—just don't forget that it's delicious, too.

Robert Wemischner wrote *The Vivid Flavors Cookbook* and is writing a book about cooking with tea. He teaches professional baking and culinary arts classes in Los Angeles. ◆





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THE LOOK THAT COOKS

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# Eight Cookbooks to Enjoy In *and* Out of the Kitchen

A warm summer afternoon is the perfect time to leave the kitchen behind, settle into your deck chair, and immerse yourself in a little culinary history, untangle the roots of another country's cuisine, or just get inside the mind of a creative cook. You'll discover that this summer's new cookbooks are about more than just good recipes. Maybe you'll be inspired to take an Asian cooking class, plant an herb garden, cater a party for fifty, or even build a bread oven. And no doubt you'll come away with some great ideas for dinner, too.

***Southeast Asian Specialties: A Culinary Journey through Singapore, Malaysia & Indonesia***, is the latest book in an excellent series called *Culinaria* from the German publisher Könemann. This encyclopedic volume is packed with color photographs of farms, markets, artisans, cooking equipment, and, of course, regional food. Rosalind Mowe, a native of Singapore, a teacher, and a cookbook author, is the editor of the *Southeast Asian* volume. Reading her introduction, where she describes accepting a friendly cup of tea in a tin can from a member of the Orang Asli, the indigenous Malayan forest-dwellers, you know she's done her research.

Starting in food-crazed Singapore, where "*Ni chi bao*

*le ma?*" ("Have you eaten yet?") is a popular greeting, Mowe takes us from breakfast in a coffee shop to Singapore's many vendors (tea sellers, herbalists), and on to factories where traditional methods of making soy sauce, oyster sauce, and sesame oil are demonstrated. We travel through Malaysia, where we watch cartoonish-looking tropical fruits like the gigantic bumpy-skinned jackfruit and the thorny durian get broken down to edible bits. And we follow the spice harvest among the cassia trees, vanilla plants, nutmeg trees, and climbing pepper vines of Indonesia. Along the way, Rowe includes straightforward recipes for dozens of traditional dishes like crispy duck, stir-fried noodles, oxtail soup, and fish in bamboo leaves.

To journey slightly closer to home (a 17th century château in Burgundy), spend a year in the French countryside with Amanda Hesser. ***The Cook & the Gardener: A Year of Recipes & Writings from the French Countryside*** is the enchanting story of Hesser's cautious befriending of a curmudgeonly gardener during the four seasons she spent cooking for Anne Willan, founder of *Ecole de Cuisine La Varenne*, and the many guests of the *Château du Feÿ*.

As Hesser finds her culinary footing, she realizes the kitchen is inextricably linked

to the garden—and the curious habits of its caretaker, M. Milbert. "I needed to know what was going on within those walls in order to better understand my ingredients in the kitchen. I wanted to know why thyme's intensity fluctuated, why the leeks sweetened with age, when the raspberries would be at their peak. And there was something else, too. There was more to that old man than his gruff manner and questionable reputation."

In courting the wisdom of M. Milbert, Hesser gained the kind of old-fashioned seasonal sensibility that many of us have lost today—and her delightful recipes reflect this. As I began reading the book in late spring, I decided to make a number of simple dishes from her spring recipes—a lovely dish of creamy leeks on toast with tarragon and goat cheese, a perfect herb-dressed asparagus vinaigrette, and a strawberry-rhubarb confit. Hesser's other three seasons' worth of well-written recipes (charmingly illustrated and arranged by month), from August's Grilled Lamb Chops with Warm Tomato-Mint Vinaigrette, to November's Braised Chicken with Olives

& Bay Leaves, only get more enticing as the garden peaks and shuffles into winter, Hesser and Milbert with it.

Here at *Fine Cooking*, we have come under the spell of Spain's famous rice dish, paella, ever since associate editor Sarah Jay produced a story on the real thing (see "Paella," *Fine Cooking* #33). So when Penelope Casas, the well-known author of *The Foods & Wines of Spain* (and a recipient of the Spanish National Prize of Gastronomy), decided to turn her attention to researching paella, we were excited. ***Paella!*** is the perfect segue for *Fine Cooking* readers (and editors) who enjoyed learning to make paella and who want to try some of the variations found in restaurants and homes in different regions of Spain.

Before heading into the kitchen, check out Casas's excellent "Tips for the Perfect Paella," which should help you to understand what real paella is (a rice dish) and is not (an excuse for piles of garnishes). But be warned, a lot of page-flipping may occur when it comes to choosing





which paella to make first. Spinach, Chickpea & Pine Nut Paella or Cod, Cauliflower & Artichoke Paella? Garlicky Clam Paella or Andalusian-Style Chicken Paella? Stuck? Start with Valencia's Traditional Paella.

And if Asia, France, and Spain don't lure you, perhaps the Italian way with pasta will. I found myself nodding in appreciation of Erica de Mane's willingness to hand over the keys to being a good cook in her new book, *Pasta Improvisata: How to Improvise in Classic Italian Style*. At first, I thought, why would anyone need a book on improvising? But then I began to read de Mane's encouraging words, and I realized that to improvise pasta dishes successfully, you need to first have the right tools, starting with the very basic knowledge of how to cook pasta correctly—plenty of water (six quarts for a pound of pasta) and plenty of salt (two tablespoons). De Mane offers hundreds of practical tips (don't overchop herbs for pasta sauce or they'll become bitter; don't throw every ingredient you've got on hand into a vegetable sauce for pasta, but let the delicate flavor of one vegetable stand out), but always in a casual, not condescending voice.

It's a text-heavy book, but it's stuffed with delicious recipes (Cavatelli with Morels, Montasio Cheese & Arugula; Orecchiette with Roasted Corn, Red Peppers & Ricotta Salata; Saffron Tagliatelle with Lobster, Tomato & Cognac), and twice as many suggestions for substitutions, variations, and improvisations as actual recipes themselves.

For a visual feast, there is no better book this season than *Martha Stewart's Hors d'Oeuvres Handbook*. The first 225 pages are stunning full-color photos. As you look at them, you realize there are a lot of new ideas here—300 all-new recipes, to be exact.

Caterers and cooks who like to entertain should go crazy for this latest Martha Stewart book, which has the added advantage of being co-written by respected *Martha Stewart Living* food editor Susan Spungen. This means there are plenty of technique tips throughout the recipe section, which begins with a chapter on building blocks for hors d'oeuvres, including in-

If you flip through *The Chile Pepper Encyclopedia*, you'll easily find a good recipe for chile sauce, jerk pork, enchiladas, Thai curry, Mexican salsa, Penang chicken satay, or Sichuan beef; they're all there. But if you slow down and read what lies between the recipes, you'll find a carefully edited collection of chile history, folklore, agriculture, and botany, all arranged alphabetically for easy reference. Chile expert Dave DeWitt, author of more than a dozen books on chiles, has written this book to be widely appealing, even to people who aren't "chileheads."

I had no idea how many different cultures had been

Get inside the mind of a creative cook. You'll discover that this summer's new cookbooks are about more than just good recipes.

structions on how to make tartlet shells, mini tortillas, flavored crêpes, pizza dough, *pain de mie*, and *pâte à choux*. My next favorite chapter is "Fondue, Frico & a Selection of Fine Cheeses." I had cheese on my mind when I tested a few of these recipes—frico (a crispy pan-fried disk of cheese), goat cheese "bites," and pecan-blue cheese crackers were all successful. I'd caution you not to get too hung up on the professionally styled and magically lit photographs, however. It will take you a bit of practice (not to mention soft lighting and a warehouse of chic tableware) to get your food to look as good as some of these pictures.

dramatically affected by chiles, which may have been domesticated as early as 6,000 B.C. in Bolivia. The Incas depended on two chiles, *ajis* and *rocotos*, as their principal spice and major crop. More recently, when Portuguese traders brought chiles to West Africa (and birds quickly spread them east), chiles thrived in the warm climate and soon became a major crop, and today they provide the distinguishing heat of many African cuisines. Chiles are also valued for their medicinal use in Africa; perhaps we, too, should try chewing raw red and green chiles as a cold remedy; I'm sure it clears the sinuses.

The cultural combination of good food and food that's good for you is not just an idea but a practice in China. In her new book, *A Spoonful of Ginger*, Nina Simonds (author of *Asian Noodles* and *Classic Chinese Cuisine*) presents what she calls "health-giving" Asian recipes, based on the Chinese belief that good health comes from a balance of foods that are either yin (cooling to the body) or yang (warming to the body), depending on the energy they create.

This is first and foremost a cookbook, and all of Simonds's recipes, like her soothing soups (Thai Beef with Mint, Ginger Chicken, Chinese Cinnamon Barley), would be pleasing to cook even if you didn't need to bolster your resistance. Who knew I was feeding my husband a perfectly balanced meal as he devoured Garlic Beef with Broccoli? (Beef is warming, broccoli cooling.)

The last book in the summer collection is one that I know *Fine Cooking's* hardcore bakers will read cover to cover. In *The Bread Builders: Hearth Loaves & Masonry Ovens*, Daniel Wing and Alan Scott set out to show why great bread can only be created by natural fermentation and baking in hot masonry. Along the way, they document the grassroots artisan breadbaking movement with visits to bakers from Vermont to California. These visits are engrossing sidebars to the rest of the book, which is a primer for anyone who wants to bake great bread or who wants to find or build the masonry to cook it in.

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Susie Middleton is an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*. ♦



**For flavor without toughness, use a low-acid marinade for shrimp.**

## Marinades Add Flavor but Don't Always Tenderize

**T**here is a commonly held belief that soaking a tough cut of meat in a marinade will make it tender. Sadly, this just isn't true much of the time. While some marinades are very successful at adding flavor to meat, chicken, and fish, they are, with one exception, a disaster at tenderizing.

The two most popular types of marinades are acidic (made with citrus, vinegar, or wine) and enzymatic (made with ingredients such as pineapple and papaya). Although both types work primarily on the surface of the food, they lead to different results: highly acidic marinades can actually toughen food, while enzymatic marinades can turn the surface of the food to mush. For true tenderizing, the most effective marinades are those that contain dairy products.

### Acidic marinades add flavor but may toughen

One marinade family relies on mildly acidic ingredients, like citrus juice, vinegar, or wine.

**Acidic marinades “denature” proteins.** Imagine the protein in raw meat, chicken, or fish as individual units of coiled ribbon, with bonds holding each coil in a tight

bundle. When these proteins are exposed to an acidic marinade, the bonds break and the proteins unwind. Almost immediately, one unwound protein runs into another unwound protein and they bond together into a loose mesh. (This is the same thing that happens when proteins are exposed to heat.)

At first, water molecules are attached to and trapped within this protein mesh, so the tissue remains juicy and tender. But after a short time, if the protein is in a very acidic marinade, the protein bonds tighten, water is squeezed out, and the tissue becomes tough. If you've ever tried marinating shrimp in highly acidic ingredients, it's likely that you're familiar with this result.

**In limited cases, mildly acidic marinades can add wonderful flavor to fish and meat,** especially if you enhance the mixture with fresh herbs, spices, or perhaps another liquid like Worcestershire sauce. The key is to use the correct strength acid for the food you're marinating. For shrimp, I use a low-acid marinade (perhaps one part mild acid to four parts oil) to avoid toughness. For example,

I might use two tablespoons each of vinegar and caper juice and one cup of oil.

A fairly tight-textured cut of meat like flank steak can survive a more acidic marinade. Since the marinade only penetrates a fraction of an inch, it won't toughen the meat.

### Enzymes make meat mushy

Another approach is to use enzymatic marinades, which work by breaking down muscle fiber and collagen (connective tissue). Raw pineapple, figs, papaya, honeydew melon, ginger, and kiwi all contain such enzymes, known collectively as proteases (protein enzymes). Unfortunately, these enzymes work almost too well, turning tough meat muscle into mush without passing through any intermediate stage of tenderness. The longer the meat marinates, the greater the breakdown of proteins and the mushier the texture.

My experience with tenderizing enzymes mirrors that of Dr. Nicholas Kurti, a famous Oxford physicist who tried tenderizing a pork roast by injecting half with pineapple juice, leaving the other half untouched. A noted chef, Michel Roux, was to judge on television which side was better. After cooking, the half treated with pineapple was total mush and looked like a pile of stuffing. Not surprisingly, Chef Roux preferred the untreated half. (He did try to find something nice to say about the mushy half. Notic-

ing its crisp skin, Chef Roux announced, “But the crackling is superb!” Dr. Kurti used the comment as the title for his book on his experiments with tenderizing enzymes.)

Most commercial meat tenderizers rely on enzymes to do their “tenderizing” (a papaya enzyme, papain, is a common ingredient in these products), so I stay away from them.

### For true tenderizing, use buttermilk or yogurt

Dairy products are, in my opinion, the only marinades that truly tenderize. Hunters have long known to marinate tough game in milk, Indian recipes use yogurt marinades for lamb and tough goat meat, and some southern cooks soak chicken in buttermilk before frying. Buttermilk and yogurt are only mildly acidic, so they don't toughen the way strongly acidic marinades do. It's not quite clear how the tenderizing occurs, but it seems that calcium in dairy products activates enzymes in meat that break down proteins, a process similar to the way that aging tenderizes meat.

**In deciding how long to marinate, consider the texture of the meat or fish.** In general, open-textured flesh like fish fillets needs only a few minutes of soaking. I love making “fish fingers” by briefly immersing strips of fish fillets in buttermilk seasoned with cayenne, dusting them with seasoned flour, and then frying them. Food with a tighter texture, such as chicken or lamb, can tolerate several hours in a marinade, even one that's mildly acidic.

*Shirley O. Corriher is the author of Cook Wise (Morrow). ♦*



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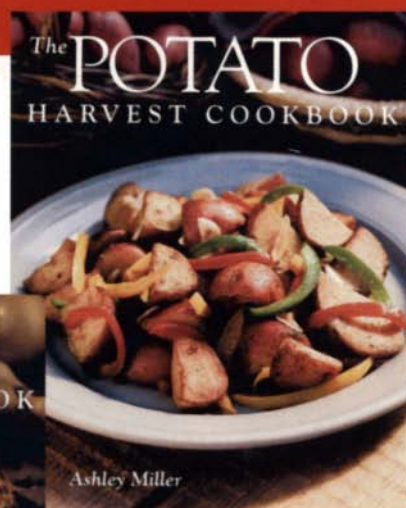
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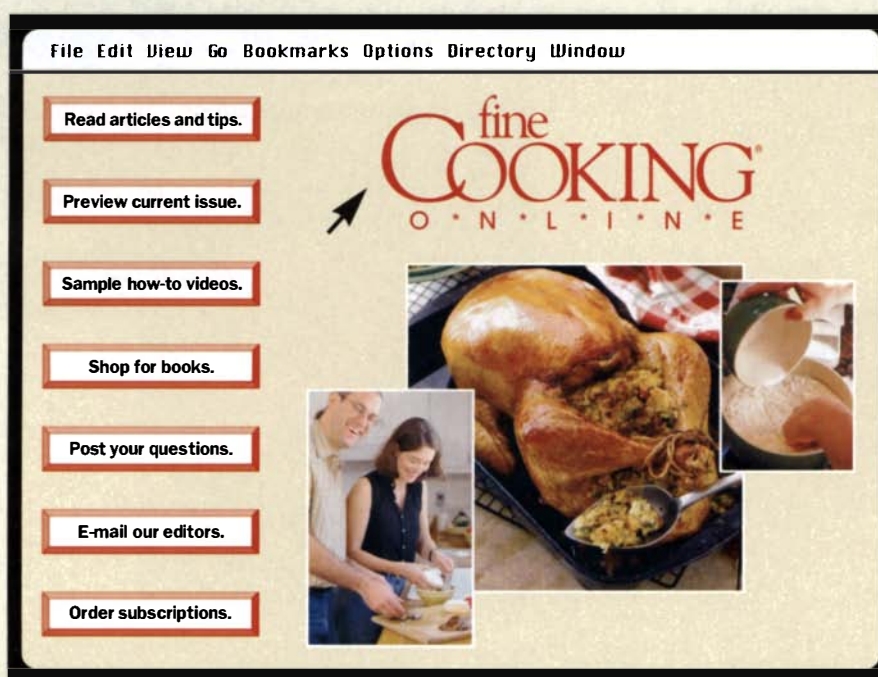
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## NUTRITION INFORMATION

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Basic Buttermilk Pancakes	17	140	35	5	21	4	2	1	0.5	40	260	1	per pancake
Ravioli with Grilled Vegetable Sauce	25	500	230	17	57	25	10	11	2	65	430	10	w/o Parmesan
Spaghetti with Grilled Eggplant	25	460	130	12	72	14	2	8	3	0	610	7	w/o Parmesan
Penne with Grilled Chicken	26	900	370	50	83	41	6	27	5	95	1,150	8	w/o Parmesan
Simple Southern Fried Chicken	29	660	360	53	18	40	11	16	10	160	1,020	1	
Old-Fashioned Cream Gravy	29	70	45	2	4	5	2	2	1	10	250	0	per ¼ cup (using milk)
Traditional Cole Slaw	32	20	5	1	4	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	125	1	per ½ cup
Apple & Fennel Slaw	32	60	30	1	7	3.5	0.5	2.5	0.5	0	90	2	per ½ cup
Warm Cabbage Slaw with Country Ham	32	45	25	2	4	2.5	0.5	1.5	0.5	5	160	2	per ½ cup
Tomato "Confit"	34	50	30	1	5	3	0.5	2	0.5	0	40	1	per piece
Tomato, Basil & Goat Cheese Terrine	35	340	240	7	22	27	6	17	3	10	340	5	per serving
Niçoise Vinaigrette	35	60	60	0	0	7	1	5	1	0	65	0	per tablespoon
Grilled Oysters	36	20	15	1	1	1.5	1	0.5	0	5	35	0	per oyster, ½ tsp. sauce
Grilled Clams	36	20	10	2	1	1.5	0.5	0.5	0	10	20	0	per clam, ½ tsp. sauce
Garlic-Butter Sauce	38	25	20	0	0	2.5	1.5	0.5	0	5	20	0	per teaspoon
Verjus Sauce	38	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	per teaspoon
Eggplant with Tomato & Garlic Sauce	41	220	160	3	15	18	2	13	2	0	160	5	
Eggplant & Pepper Dip	42	15	10	0	1	1	0	0.5	0	0	25	0	per tablespoon
Grilled Eggplant Sandwich	42	570	340	14	47	37	8	23	4	15	840	8	
Eggplant with Fragrant Spices & Herbs	43	150	100	2	12	11	2	3	6	0	125	4	per ½ cup
Cakey Brownies	47	130	70	2	16	8	4	2	1	35	40	1	per brownie
Chewy Brownies	47	200	90	3	27	10	6	3	1	40	40	1	per brownie
Fudgy Brownies	48	210	120	3	22	13	8	3	1	60	30	1	per brownie
Blondies	48	190	80	2	28	9	4	3	1	40	40	1	per blondie
Chocolate Brownie Cookies	49	70	45	1	7	5	2	1	1	15	15	0	per cookie
Summer Tempura	60	530	280	17	48	31	2	25	3	110	2,100	4	per appetizer portion
Summer Stone Fruit Shortcakes	64	460	150	8	69	17	10	5	1	45	670	3	
Plum Galette with Lemon Crust	64	300	100	4	48	11	7	3	1	30	55	2	based on 10 servings
Summer Stone Fruit & Almond Cobbler	66	430	130	7	70	15	6	6	1	50	260	6	
Upside-Down Apricot Cake	67	320	100	5	52	11	6	3	1	70	115	1	based on 10 servings
Rice & Eggs with Peas & Herbs	82	440	100	15	69	12	7	3	1	80	470	4	

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

# Rice & Eggs—Fast Food That's Good for You

**W**e often think of rice as a side dish, but we forget that around the world it's viewed more often as the main course. To move it from the side to the center of the plate, it needs some embellishment, not only for flavor but also for nutritional value. (Unless rice is in its whole form, it isn't particularly nutritious.) Add some vegetables and, in this case, an egg or two, and the rice becomes more delicious as well as more sustaining.

When mixed in quickly, the eggs practically disappear but for the nice shine and

fuller flavor they leave behind. The trick is to whisk the eggs until frothy and then stir them quickly into the still-hot rice. As in pasta alla carbonara, the eggs cook on contact with the steaming grain. I usually figure on about one egg per cup of rice. For this recipe, take a look at your eggs: one jumbo or large egg is fine for the amount of rice called for, but for smaller eggs, you might want to use two.

## Try flavorful additions and different grains

Made from ingredients that

are almost always on hand, this is a fast, nourishing dish that's homey and comforting. And it's a great way to use up those small amounts of vegetables and herbs that are hanging out in the refrigerator: those few spears of asparagus, that handful of broccoli florets, the last of the basil. The possible flavor combinations are endless. Just about anything you'd add to risotto or pasta would also work here.

You can use any kind of rice you like, or try another one of your favorite grains, cooked until tender and drained of any excess water. Here are just a few possibilities:

- ◆ Cook the rice and add just the egg and the butter. Then stir in  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup of basil pesto, a couple of tablespoons of toasted pine nuts, some feta or Parmesan cheese, and serve with chopped tomatoes scattered on top. Or try adding chopped roasted red bell peppers (poblanos would be tasty, too), scallions, and cooked corn; garnish with cilantro and toasted pumpkin seeds, called *pepitas*.

- ◆ Toss hot, cooked brown rice with just the eggs and then add two cups of cooked mustard greens that have been tossed with some minced garlic and a little olive oil. Garnish with chopped, toasted walnuts.

- ◆ Cook barley until tender, add the eggs and butter, and then stir in wild mushrooms that have been sautéed in butter with shallots. Sprinkle with parsley mixed with a little tarragon.

## Rice & Eggs with Peas & Herbs

This light dish is perfect for summer; sautéed mushrooms and a little chopped ham would make it heartier. Serves four.

**3 cups water**

**Salt**

**1½ cups rice**

**1 cup fresh or frozen peas**

**1 or 2 eggs**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

**2 Tbs. butter, at room temperature**

**½ cup freshly grated**

**Parmesan cheese; more for garnish**

**4 scallions (whites and some of the greens), thinly sliced**

**3 Tbs. chopped fresh basil or chervil**

**Grated zest of 1 lemon**

In a medium saucepan, bring the water and a pinch of salt to a boil. Add the rice, reduce to a simmer, cover, and cook until tender, 15 to 20 min.

Meanwhile, in a small saucepan, cook the peas in a little water until tender.

Crack the egg or eggs into a small bowl, season with salt and pepper, and beat until frothy. When the rice is done and all the water is gone (drain off any excess and return the rice to the pot, if necessary), rapidly stir in the beaten egg, butter, and cheese. Add the peas, scallions, basil or chervil, and lemon zest; stir to combine. Season with salt and pepper. Serve with additional grated cheese.

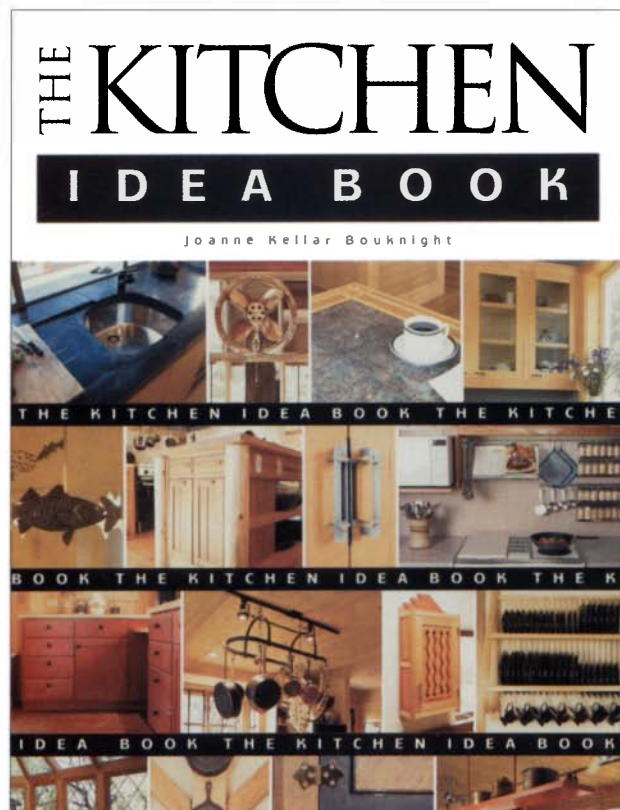
*Deborah Madison, the founding chef of Greens restaurant in San Francisco, is the author of the award-winning Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone (Broadway), as well as The Savory Way and The Greens Cookbook. She lives in Santa Fe. ♦*



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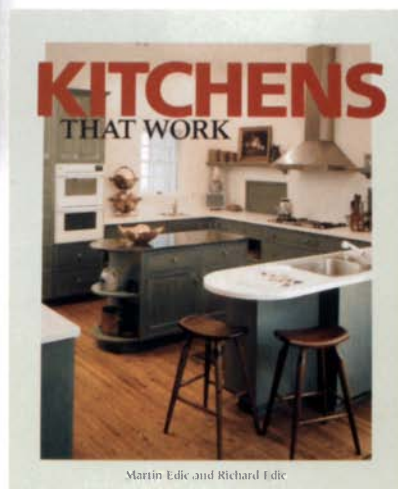
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When Toni Elling began crystallizing flowers out of her home in upstate New York five years ago, she worried that someone might start mass-producing these enchanting, edible creations. She needn't have. Though the process is simple—coat the flower with egg white, sprinkle it with superfine sugar, and let it dry—it's painstaking work that takes the mindset of a true artisan. The delicacy of the work requires that each flower be done by hand, one at a time. In fact, after trying their hand at crystallizing flowers themselves, many of her customers gladly pay \$2.50 per flower. "People who do it for themselves become aware of the effort involved," explains Toni, whose company, Meadowsweets, also sells a flower crystallizing kit, containing pasteurized powdered egg whites, superfine sugar, tweezers, a brush, and a finished flower for inspiration. With a mischievous smile, she adds, "Many of our kit customers then call to place an order for flowers already crystallized." And their cakes look more beautiful for it.



Toni and her daughter, Elizabeth, who is launching a Meadowsweets on the West Coast, have worked closely together for years. They grow their own flowers to be certain that no harmful pesticides have been used. Some edible flowers include pansies, violas, violets, and apple blossoms. Aside from safety (some flowers themselves are naturally toxic), how a flower will hold its color is an important consideration.



**A wash of egg white glistens on delicate petals.** Toni uses a brush to paint both sides of the blossom. When coating more resilient flowers, she uses her fingers to rub on the egg white, which speeds the process somewhat.



**A dusting of superfine sugar preserves the flowers and makes them sparkle.** Holding the trimmed flower with tweezers, Toni is careful to cover all surfaces.



**Drying can take up to two days, depending on humidity.** Once dried, the flowers can easily shatter, so they must be handled and packed with utmost care.

